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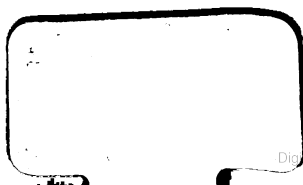
The man who lost his past

Frank Richardson

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SEMI-SOCIETY

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London : CHATTO & WINDUS, 111 St. Martin's Lane, W.C.

THE MAN WHO LOST HIS PAST



BY
FRANK RICHARDSON
AUTHOR OF
"THE KING'S COUNSEL"

WITH 50 ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BROWNE, R.I.

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1903

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THE MAN WHO LOST HIS PAST

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WITH THE FRENCH NOVEL

THE little man was absolutely dazed.

That he had escaped with his life and "Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre" seemed almost a miracle, for the two other occupants of the first-class compartment had been practically abolished. Several carriages had been telescoped, a luggage van had been annihilated, an engine driver had been killed, and various miscellaneous mutilations had been caused by some cryptic misfeasance resulting in the wrecking at Chalk Farm Station of the mid-day express from Manchester to London.

To the congratulations of the London and North-Western officials the little man made scarcely a reply. When it had been several times explained

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to him that but for the fact that he had been lying with his feet on the opposite cushions of the carriage at the moment of the collision, he would have been—at the best—a torso, his answers were phlegmatic and incoherent.

“*Il n’y a pas de quoi,*” he repeated, with vacant eyes.

“I’ve no patience with them Germans,” was the comment of a railway policeman. “They never know their luck.”

The railway policeman assumed that “any person or persons unknown,” speaking a language which was not English, without insulting him, must be of the equable Teuton stock, people who, though made in Germany, insisted on taking English bread out of British mouths.

He did not wish to waste his sympathy, and moved away through the crowd of sympathizers.

“What is your name, sir?” asked an official courteously. “I trust that you are in no way injured.”

“*Pas du tout.*”

“Excuse me ; but how do you spell it ?”

The official, with note-book in hand, prepared for the worst. The Frenchman would launch forth horrible anathemas on English railroads, he would allude pointedly to Fashoda, he would

à bas the London and North-Western, he would conspuer him, the official.



But he didn't. He didn't even shrug his shoulders.

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The official feared that he must be suffering from a structural dislocation which debarred him from exercising his faculties.

He asked if there was anything that he could do for the traveller.

"*Il n'y a pas de quoi,*" came in painful and laboured accents.

It was like some horrible *Leit Motif* of vengeance on the London and North-Western—a £10,000 claim at the least.

The official became nervous. He saw himself torn to pieces in cross-examination by wild barristers.

"Anything that can be done for you, sir, the Company will be delighted to do. You understand English, I gather. Would you care to remain here in an hotel until you have recovered from the shock? After all, accidents will happen—though rarely on this line. But I am very glad that no accident has happened to you."

"*Pas du tout. Je ne suis pas blessé.*"

"He's blessed if he's hurt," translated a bystander, who happened to be a linguist.

There was no glimmer of speculation in the man's eyes. He was merely a frightened figure, holding a tattered yellow novel.

"Where do you want to go?" said the official kindly.

"Je n'en sais rien."

"He don't know where 'e are," translated the linguist.

"But you have a ticket? You were in a first-class carriage," came from the official mind.

"Je ne me rappelle pas."

The linguist was at fault.

He explained that he didn't know French slang.

The traveller stared vacantly at the wreckage.

The kindly official searched him. He yielded a document, "Stockport to Euston, not transferable, available only on day of issue," and hampered by the usual restrictions, consisting of the maximum of inconvenient and illegible regulations that could be printed on a document the size of an omnibus-ticket.

Through the crowd of sympathisers, the white-faced, frightened man was led to a first-class carriage on the other side of the platform.

He fell huddled and trembling against the cushions.

The shock of the accident had wiped out or his brain all recollection of his past life.

In a few moments the train, snorting and puffing contemptuously at the anguish and pain and turmoil on the platform, bore him away to London.

CHAPTER II

HE COMES TO LONDON

At Euston there was a great deal of bustle consequent on the accident.

Large numbers of people had come to make inquiries. Infinitely larger numbers of irrelevant persons had come to see that the inquiries were properly made, and to give advice generally.

Through this crowd the man with the French novel walked automatically, and as though on mechanical legs.

He passed out of the station, through the huge lowering archway and into the Euston Road.

To all outward appearance he was a well-constructed man, though neither ornamental nor attractive.

And yet, he was mentally only an hour and a half old. It is an exceedingly awkward predicament for a man, wearing a grey frock-coat, a "Gent.'s Albert," a cloth cricket-cap, and black

whiskers, to realize that he is only an hour and a half old. He feels that he is a contradiction in terms.

People who, having led virtuous and prudent lives, look—say, ten years—younger than they actually are, plume themselves considerably on the fact. A man of sixty-five is justly proud if he presents to an admiring world the figure and features of a young fellow of sixty-four. But the man with the French novel was exactly forty-eight in appearance. Roughly speaking, therefore, he was forty-seven years, fifty-one weeks, six days, and twenty-two-and-a-half hours younger than he appeared to be.

This is an alarming state of things to be brought suddenly to the notice of any man.

The little Frenchman was thinking very hard as he walked Westward along the Euston Road. But his thoughts had only a scope of an hour and a half to work on. He remembered a crash, some



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shrieks, and Chalk Farm Station. This sounds like the title of a modern, epigrammatic novel. But, in fact, it expresses the entire reminiscences of an individual who, in appearance, was exactly forty-eight years old. It may aptly be said of him that he was a man absolutely without a past. Practically he had been born in the accident. Just as surely as Athene sprang full-grown from the head of Zeus, so surely was the man with the black whiskers born in a first-class compartment at Chalk Farm Station.

These are facts. The astounding thing is that he should have been born French. This may be (psychologically) accounted for by the fact that at the time of the accident he was reading a French novel. He did not account for it in that way. In fact, he did not account for it at all. There were so many things that he tried to account for and failed.

So absorbing was his wish to find out who he was and what, that he scarcely realized that he was French. He unconsciously assumed French nationality on what was, perhaps, insufficient evidence. Fortunately he could read English with ease. The names on the shops seemed familiar to him. Though he had no idea as to what street he would come to next, when he saw the name of the street he realized that the name was correct.

He never expected any given shop or cab-rank or hotel to be in any given place. But, on reaching the shop, cab-rank, or hotel, he was quite familiar with it. It seemed natural. The expected never happened, merely because he could not expect. He had nothing to work on. But every building was in its right place, just where he would have expected it to be had he been able to expect.

Each of us has experience of some occurrence which seemed to be happening for the second time in our lives. This is caused, it is said, by reason of the two hemispheres of the brain being out of harmony for the moment. But with every step the wanderer took he seemed to be walking back into familiar circumstances of life. This state of things was evidently caused by the accident at Chalk Farm Station.

* * * * *

By the time that he reached the Marylebone Road he had, as far as was possible, grasped the situation. He found that he must look upon himself from the point of view of an ignorant but deeply interested spectator. It should be his duty to find out everything about himself, his habits, his powers of digestion or otherwise, his age, his religion and politics, his financial status, his name and address, and the other

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details that constituted the ego of the person who was wearing a frock-coat and "a heather mixture" cricket-cap in a public thoroughfare. He was an explorer.

CHAPTER III

HE EXPLORES

ON reaching the Great Central Hotel, he was pleased to discover that he was hungry. The clock showed him that it was half-past eight, but without its assistance he had found out that he was hungry.

He entered the hotel. It seemed to him unfamiliar. The architectural scheme was a cross between the Paddington Baths and a railway station. The few early diners who were taking coffee in the hall were astounded at the appearance of a man with black whiskers and a frock-coat, striding aggressively towards the dining-room.

Apparently he attempted to take off a non-existent hat, missed it, and with a gesture of irritation seized a cricket-cap, and thrust it hurriedly into a pocket of his coat.

He sat down at a table.

"*Garçon !*"

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The waiter brought a menu of the *table d'hôte* dinner.

"Apportez le dîner."

He felt that he was in a draught.

"Garçon, fermez la fenêtre."



"I don't speak French, sir." The little man himself was not actually speaking French, but rather a sort of Lancashire *patois*.

"Alors, envoyez un garçon qui le parle."

A French waiter appeared, and after a few

moments' conversation was astonished at a person of purely British appearance talking a chaotic imitation of the French language.

Having closed the window, he drew the attention of other waiters to the new arrival.

After examining the wine-list, he ordered a bottle of Berncastler Doctor. He had a feeling that he would appreciate the wine, and when he found that it suited his palate he congratulated himself on his refined taste.

That was the first discovery that he made about himself. He liked Berncastler Doctor. But that appreciation threw no light on the important questions of name and address, religion and politics. By the time that he had finished the bottle he became intensely interested in his personality. In fact, he took a very favourable view of himself—whoever he might be.

Also he had eaten an enormous dinner. Possibly he had eaten something which disagreed with him. He pooh-poohed the idea. Why shouldn't he have the digestion of an ostrich? In other respects he was behaving rather like one.

To be on the safe side, he ordered a cup of black coffee and a liqueur of Benedictine; that couldn't hurt any ostrich. Then it struck him that he wasn't an ostrich; and he began to feel that he hadn't any digestion worth speaking about.

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He had eaten caviare, and tomatoes, and Gorgonzola cheese. Good heavens ! Any one of these things might be fatal to him, if he only knew it.

He felt that he should know it—he was knowing it, now.

Possibly he had committed suicide. If he hadn't, then, next day he would consult a medical man, and get thoroughly *au fait* with the condition of his interior. He would take the best advice as to how to deal with it.

Perhaps he was really a dipsomaniac, or a teetotaler !

He was, at present, quite in the dark.

The best thing to do was to go to bed.

Having paid the bill with a sovereign, which he found with three others in a waistcoat-pocket, he went to the office of the hotel, and asked for a room.

Foreigners, whose only luggage consists of "Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre," who insist on talking bad French when they are palpably of British origin, are not received with enthusiasm at our best hotels.

"What name, sir ?" said the clerk.

What the Dickens was his name !

"*Il n'y a pas de quoi*," he replied, airily.

"Marquis or Count ?" asked the clerk, not without suspicion.

With a touch of inspiration he answered, "*Non, non Monsieur Smith, Monsieur Jacques Smith.*"

"Mr. Jack Smith. Any luggage?"

"*Non, non. Ce n'est pas arrivé. Voici une pièce de vingt-cinq francs,*" said he, producing a sovereign as a guarantee.

Eventually he was shown up to his bedroom.

Thoroughly tired out, he undressed, and lumbered into bed. He was not conspicuously sober.

CHAPTER IV

HE IS NOT IRVING

THE sun was shining brightly into his room. The pointed black whiskers peered over the sheets like book-markers on the whiteness of the bed.

The unsympathetic sun knew who he was, and what he was, and all about him. Perhaps the sun laughed or frowned at the poor, homeless wanderer, who was all alone in the Great Central Hotel. Anyhow, it woke him up.

When he realized who he was—that is, that he was a man who was trying to find out who he was—he stared thoughtfully at the ceiling, and reviewed the proceedings of the day before. The net result of his efforts to solve the question of his identity, to discover the name of the proprietor of his frame were :—

A. That the proprietor was fond of Berncastler Doctor.

B. That the frame contained a faulty digestive apparatus.

Suddenly it struck him that he had no idea what the frame itself was like.

Hastily he leaped from the bed and reviewed himself in the long glass of the wardrobe.

He was very disappointed.

The glass revealed a corpulent little man, pompous even in a vest, with a stern face, long upper-lip, black chenille eyebrows, and elaborate whisker-fittings.

He could make nothing of it.

Obviously he was not a clergyman. His clothing, though sombre, was scarcely clerical. He might be anything from a prominent financier to a veterinary surgeon in a small way of business. He might, indeed, be anything except a clergyman. And yet his face seemed to him somewhat ecclesiastical ; he rather fancied himself as a Prebendary or a Rural Dean. Possibly he was a clergyman travelling in mufti.

His whiskers precluded the supposition that he was a member of the Roman Hierarchy, or an eminent actor, or an American jockey. Indeed, no prudent jockey would handicap himself by wearing such windtraps as his whiskers.

But, after a lengthy inspection, all the data that he had collected only proved affirmatively that he was a man who wore whiskers, and that he was dissatisfied with his personal appearance.

C

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As to his moral character he knew nothing, and could only hope for the best.

He turned for confirmation to the novel, which was the only link between him and his past life. A few pages of "Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre" bitterly disappointed him.

If that journal was representative of his taste in letters—well! There was a nice thing!

The clock on the mantelpiece told him that it was twelve o'clock.

While making his toilet, he searched his clothes for any initials or other marking which might help him in any way, but he only found vague geometrical figures in red cotton. His gold watch bore a unicorn's head, under which was engraved "Quo et Quando." Clearly this was a French title—like Saye and Sele, or Bath and Wells (in French, *Bain et Puits*).

Perhaps he was the Marquis of Quo et Quando. Still, it was more like Spanish than French. Possibly it was a Papal dignity.

"Why shouldn't I be a Marquis? I have," he said aloud, "no conspicuous Radical tendencies, as far as I have discovered up to this moment."

In an instant he realized that he was talking English, that English, indeed, seemed to be his

native and most convenient medium of speech. Of Spanish he knew nothing.

That he had ever talked French at all was, he felt sure, due to the fact that he had been reading that revolting French novel when the accident occurred. A curious psychological fact.

He was not a French Marquis.

"Quo et Quando" struck him as being a Latin maxim, signifying, "whither and when," and throwing no light on his personality, or on his daily path.

Dejectedly, he looked over his clothes.

As a Court guide they were not a success. His name and address were not hinted at, the articles themselves were unhappily of anonymous make, and he could find no clue to where they had been bought. Instinctively, he felt that those responsible for their production were ashamed—and rightly—of their cut.

But he was delighted to find a pocket-book (containing four five-pound notes), a latch-key, some silver and copper coins, and a prospectus of a dog-biscuit company.

The prospectus did not help him. Though he eagerly scanned the names of the board, the vendor, the solicitors, and the accountants, he came across no name that he recognized as his own. He had a firm belief that if only he could see

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or hear his name, he would solve the mystery of his identity. On his shirt-band was a red hieroglyphic, which gave him great hope. He figured out "H. I."

"I have it," he cried. "I am Henry Irving!"

A glance at his whiskers dispelled the hope. No actor would exaggerate the gloom of Hamlet to the degree of growing black whiskers on purpose to play the part. Shylock, perhaps. . . . Romeo, no. Coriolanus, hardly.

No. Clearly he was not Irving.

He regretted it, but so it was.

Besides, the mark might just as well be "I. H."—or a washerwoman's shorthand—or nothing.

Yet, he was sorry he wasn't Irving.

He was not, evidently, either a Catholic Bishop, or Irving, or a jockey. That was something to have found out. Still, there were many men in London alone, any one of whom he might turn out to be.

But he had a certain instinctive consciousness that he was a person of importance.

Suddenly, he uttered a cry of joy.

On his collar was printed "The Duke of Connaught."

Printed—not marked with ordinary marking-ink, as is done in the case of ordinary people!

Tingling with joy, blushing with pride, he threw himself down on the bed.

That was as it should be. He was the Duke of Connaught !



How had he managed to forget an important thing like that ?

And yet he didn't seem to remember having been the Duke of Connaught. The name was familiar to him.

But it was not familiar as *his* name.

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However, the thing was proved. There it was.



If anybody doubted it, he could take off his collar, and establish his identity.

Still, one can't take off one's collars, and leave them about at people's houses like visiting-cards.

But, of course, no one would doubt it. If any one did, there would be a bad quarter of an hour for that person.

In an ecstasy of joy, he finished dressing, rushed down to the coffee-room, and ate a hurried breakfast.

He perused the morning papers to see if there was any news of the mysterious disappearance of a Royal Duke. He was glad to see that there was not.

They had been tactful enough to keep it quiet.

After breakfast he put on his disgusting cap, and went to the office to get the remainder of his sovereign.

The clerk, after deducting seven-and-six for our hero's bedroom, said, rather testily : " You were French last night, sir. Now you've thought better of it. I see you're English."

" Young man, never mind what I am or who I am. But if any one asks for the Duke of Connaught, say that he has just gone out to buy a hat."

Then he strode proudly out of the hotel.

* * * * *

" Mad ! " said the clerk. " Mad as two hatters ! Mad as Lincoln and Bennett ! "

CHAPTER V

THE MAD HATTER

IN Baker Street he found a hat shop, which he entered with such dignity as he (a loyal Englishman) considered to be the due of himself (a Royal duke).

But no duke, however royal, looks really well in a frock-coat and a heather mixture cricket-cap.

Having reviewed the different brands of silk hats recommended by the assistant, such as "The latest," "Stylish," "The Kaiser," "As now worn," "The Little Englander," "The Max Beerbohm," he selected "The Kaiser" from family feelings.

"The Kaiser" cost 18s. 6d., had the minimum of brim, ended in a pinnacle, and made him look very ridiculous.

As a hat it was either an insult or an unpractical joke.

The assistant was delighted to get rid of the unmarketable structure! He would really have

taken the heather mixture kettleholder in exchange, and been satisfied with the bargain. The Duke, however, did not suggest any such scheme. With Imperial pomposity he took a sovereign out of his waistcoat-pocket. On reflection, he replaced it, and pursued a course more fitting to his dignity.

Producing the four five-pound notes, he asked if the shopman could change one, and the shopman did so.

"Shall I send the 'gent.'s tweed cap' home, sir?"

The Duke didn't want the "gent.'s tweed," so he told the assistant to send it to the clerk in the office of the Great Central Hotel, "with the Duke of Connaught's compliments."

The shopman demurred.

"You don't know me, I see." Calmly, and with absolute self-control, he broke the news. "I am the Duke of Connaught."

The effect on the shopman was astounding. He gazed in sheer surprise at the quaintly whiskered creature, crowned with the monstrous hat. Then he turned pale, vaulted with extreme skill over the counter, and entrenched himself in a laager of hat-boxes.

When he felt safe, he observed triumphantly to the Duke, "You can't touch me. I've got my fingers crossed."

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"I have no wish to touch you. While admiring your agility, I am at a loss to understand the reason of your manœuvres."



"Anyhow, I've got my fingers crossed," said the assistant firmly.

(The Duke was not aware that crossing the

fingers is regarded by certain classes as a specific against the attacks of dangerous lunatics.)

“No doubt,” he said kindly, but with considerable dignity, “in leaping over that counter with such extreme rapidity you may have sprained one



or more of your digits. If you will show me the affected fingers——”

“Don’t you dare to come near me !” shrieked the hatter. “It’s no good. You’d better not

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move. I advise you not to. If you do, it'll be all up with the dukedom. My fingers are still crossed. Be prepared for the worst."

The Duke stared at him long and earnestly. At length he said thoughtfully, "You are a hatter."

"I've got my fingers crossed."

"But you are a hatter."

"Yes."

"Well, that explains it."

A paragon of deportment, he walked out of the shop.

He was wearing with unconscious pride the most appalling silk hat that had been seen in Baker Street since '74.

CHAPTER VI

HE MEETS A HEARTY MAN AND INAUGURATES
"THE PARKER HAT"

WHILST walking along and pondering on the madness of the hatter, he reached a photographer's shop, in the window of which were displayed photographs of Royal and other celebrities.

On the spur of the moment he decided to verify himself.

"Have you a photograph of the Duke of Connaught?" he asked the young lady in the shop.

"Oh yes, sir."

She produced a quantity.

He was as a man hit by a beam between the eyes. He staggered.

They were not a bit like him.

"Are these considered good?" he asked faintly.

The photographs had no whiskers, and otherwise flattered him.

"Yes, sir; but perhaps they are not quite

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handsome enough for his Royal Highness," she answered, admiringly.

"But have you got a photograph of him before he—before I grew my whiskers?"

"I don't know, sir. How long is it since you grew your whiskers?"

This question he could not, of course, answer; the whiskers might have been of late growth, or it was possible that from early manhood he had been an habitual whisker-wearer.

Tactfully, therefore, he said, "My dear young lady, you must use your own judgment."

"Well, you see, sir, if you ask me——"

"And I do ask you, young lady."

She was coquettish and had a sweet smile.

"Whiskers have quite gone out now, you know, sir. I don't think we photograph more than ten'pairs a year. I should think you've had your set about fifteen years."

He became pale. Clearly he was not the Duke of Connaught, had never been the Duke of Connaught. He felt that he was sinking back into his native nothingness.

Little suspecting the depth of his grief, the assistant said chaffingly—

"Most girls don't like them, but I do. I think they finish off the face."

Absently he said, "What?"

"Why, whiskers!"

Staring vacantly at her, he said, "Do they, indeed?"

Still he clung to hope.

How many of us who have suddenly ceased to be dukes have found our faculties absolutely unimpaired by the shock?

Not a dozen.

Staring seriously at her, he said, "As between man and woman, I want to ask you a question."

"Oh, sir, this is very sudden."

"Yes, it is—damned sudden."

"You know I liked you directly I saw you. You seemed such a kind gentleman. And I do so respect kindness, both in men and women."

"Now, do you consider, as a woman of the world, employed in a photographer's shop in Baker Street, that I am or am not the Duke of Connaught?"

The gleam in his eye was terrible.

His pinnaced hat had slipped on one side. His whiskers stood out aggressively, like the prongs of a pitchfork.

She stared at him for a moment with blank eyes. Then, in an instant, she became De Wet, and "trekked" at intense speed to the back of the shop, crying out, "Help!"

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The late Duke passed out into Baker Street.

Deep sorrow had set her seal upon his brow. If he had been sinning continuously for three weeks in hot weather he would not have looked as miserable as he did then.

Baker Street was the stony-hearted foster-mother of this one-day-old infant. Five minutes ago he had been a duke ; now he was—well, he would not venture to say.

The girl in the photographer's shop, who was clearly acquainted with the faces of all celebrities, obviously did not recognize him as a man of mark.

That was the awful blow.

Whoever he was—and he must of course be somebody—he was not a person of any considerable importance.

If he was anybody—and everything pointed to the fact that he must be—then he was a nobody ; and when one has been a Royal Duke for twenty-five minutes and has behaved as such, it is far from pleasant to be completely convinced that one is a nobody.

Suddenly he was clapped on the back by a hearty man, a red-faced fellow who behaved as a very popular person.

“How are you, Sir Theodore ? How are things going in the world of cross-examination ? Eh ? What ?”

"Sir, you are presuming on a slight acquaintance," said the ex-Duke angrily, with aching shoulders.

HOW ARE YOU,
SIR THEODORE?



"Always a forensic repartee on the tip of your tongue! Eh? What?"

The hearty man dug him in the ribs, with a breezy violence which only a very popular and

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athletic personage would have ventured to inflict on an acquaintance in a public place. The hearty man's method of greeting his friends was a branch of assault and battery.

"Don't you dare to do that again, sir! Are we in London, or are we in Siberia? Come, come, sir."

The hearty man roared with laughter.

"Very good! Capital! Are we in London or Siberia? Eh? What?" he repeated.

When he had got through with his merriment, he stared at "Sir Theodore" for a full minute.

"By Jove, what a shocking hat!" he said, and adjourned for purposes of laughter.

"Sir Theodore" was furious.

"My hat may or may not be shocking. But your merriment is most ill-timed. If the hat be, as you say, a shocking hat—which I do not for one moment admit—that unfortunate state of things is accounted for by the fact that it is the work of a hatter who is not the sanest of God's creatures."

This speech, delivered with the pomposity of a country solicitor opening an agricultural show, again convulsed the hearty man. He became purple.

"Not the sanest of God's creatures! A

hatter! Why should he be?" He vibrated with laughter and heartiness.

"My dear sir," said the kindly ex-Duke. "If you are at all liable to apoplexy I should advise you to cease taking an interest in my hat, and to continue your pedestrian exercise—let me urge—in some other direction. Baker Street, sir, is wide."

"Your hat! My God! Your hat! A hat like that could turn out a Ministry. Sit on it. Pawn it, burn it; but for the sake of your children and your country never wear it."

"I've just bought it. I absolutely decline to destroy it. It seems to me a very good hat. It is not an architectural feature in a great city. It is merely a hat."

"Merely a hat!" echoed the hearty man. "Nonsense. It is the hat of hats. It is one in a thousand! A million! There never has been such a hat. It is a pinnacle, a monument, a sugar-loaf. But in the ordinary acceptance of the word it cannot accurately be described as a hat, or head covering. May I call it a monument?"

"No, sir, you may not. You may make no further allusion to it at all. Either it is a hat or it is not a hat. In any event, I wear it *as* a hat."

"And you charter a lunatic to construct it! Sir Theodore Parker, K.C., M.P., employs the

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mentally unsound to construct his top hats! Philanthropic? Yes. Prudent? I scarcely think so. If you continue to wear a hat built by a lunatic, how many years' purchase is your own sanity worth?"

Then with a final and almost fatal assault he strode heartily away.

This meeting threw a new light on the identity question.

The dejected seeker after his own ego realized that the friendly expert in assault and battery knew him as Sir Theodore Parker, K.C., M.P., one of our leading legal-luminaries, knew him almost well enough to kill him.

When he had recovered from the heartiness of his friend, a warm feeling of pleasure began to permeate his being.

On the whole, there were few people that he would rather be than Sir Theodore Parker, whose reputation he knew to be enormous.

It was a well-known fact that Sir Theodore made £20,000 a year at the Bar, and was an exceedingly popular member of the House of Commons.

Almost anybody would like to be Sir Theodore Parker. Being assaulted by hearty men is, perhaps, one of the very few penalties of greatness. If he really was the eminent lawyer, he was perfectly

prepared to take on the hearty man with the rest of the business.

Still, the ex-Duke had profited by his previous



disaster, and was not prepared to become Sir Theodore Parker on the unsupported evidence of an unknown hearty man.

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He turned to another of the many photographer's shops in Baker Street to verify the Parker theory.

He entered the first "studio" that he came to.

"Have you any photographs of Sir Theodore Parker?" he asked of the anæmic assistant.

"Certainly, sir," said the young man, with the air of a menial who has been invited to enter into a joke above his station.

He produced a large box of photographs.

"We have a good many on hand. You see, Sir Theodore" (courteous but humorous smile) "is not exactly what we should call a" (affable and intelligent grimace to show that he quite understood and appreciated the joke) "Hayden-Coffin, or a Marshall-Hall. But his photographs are asked for" (doggy and insinuating leer) "by a good many ladies."

The late Duke was watching the sliding bog-like face to detect the first symptom of a cry for "Help" and a precipitate leap over the counter.

Though the man's face was intensely mobile, his figure remained stationary. This was a good sign.

"Would you care for a photograph of—ahem—Sir Theodore, in wig and gown, or coming through a gate in the ordinary evening dress of an English gentleman? We have some very

good examples of the—ahem—Demosthenes in a Trilby hat, with a view of Windsor Castle in the background. Here, again, is a very popular photograph. It represents—ahem—Sir Theodore in a punt, forensically reading his brief in 'Box v. Cox, Knox intervening.' This photo is extremely popular with Sir Theodore's constituents. The yachting cap and the punt are nautical, and appeal to the hearts of a North London constituency."

This settled it. As the photographs were spread out before him he became convinced that he was Sir Theodore.

He scarcely heard a syllable of the insinuating jargon of the shopman.

In these photographs he was depicted to the life; there could not be a doubt about his identity now.

True, there were one or two points in the photographs which did not seem accurate representations of himself. But, then, he knew himself so slightly. Indeed, should anybody reproachfully accuse him of sharp practice with the ready-made repartee, "You were not born yesterday," he could not, with any degree of confidence, give him the lie.

For all practical purposes he had been born yesterday—in a first-class carriage at Chalk Farm Station.

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As he looked purringly at the photographs, he ceased to regret that he wasn't a Royal Duke. Anybody might be born a Royal Duke. But he (Parker as he now was) had gained his position at the top of the forensic tree solely by his own merits. He was a self-made man—the proudest title under Heaven.

"I am Parker," he repeated to himself, "Theodore Parker *sum*."

But he was not proud. No. He was merely properly satisfied.

"Well, which of these photographs do you think the best?" he asked with the pleasant air of patronage (one of the most noxious attributes of the truly great).

"It's not for me to say, Sir Theodore." (Smuggled and entirely artificial laughter.) "Some fancy one: some fancy another. That's all one can say."

Sir Theodore selected a photograph of himself standing on a lugger, and apparently ruling the waves in the neighbourhood of the Albert Memorial, a very pleasing pose.

In reply to a question as to the price of the work, the assistant pooh-poohed the matter.

"To you, Sir Theodore, we, of course, make no charge. But if you intend introducing that hat—not but that it is most becoming to you,

still at first it strikes one as strange and novel—we should very much like to photograph you wearing it."

"Oh, I don't know about that," said Sir Theodore, gratified.

The photographer smiled him into it.

"If you walk in the Park in that hat, it will attract a good deal of attention. It is a new design. It will be immensely popular, and will probably be called 'The Parker.' You would be doing us a great favour if you would allow us to be the first to photograph you with it actually on."

So he was photographed in "The Parker Hat." He was photographed on a lugger. He was photographed sitting on the seashore. He was photographed reading important documents. He was photographed making a speech. He was photographed singing a hymn (for electioneering purposes). But always in "The Parker Hat."

Eventually he was bowed gratefully out of the shop in "The Parker Hat."

Still, he had but a vague idea of the personality which was now his. He knew Sir Theodore Parker in the way that every newspaper-reader knows Sir Theodore Parker—as a great name in the legal world. Of the methods by which Parker had reached his eminent position our friend knew nothing at all.

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The lawyer's was a composite personality. On being called to the Bar he had studied with extreme care the mannerisms of all the great counsel of the period.

As a man of omnivorous ambition, it had been his purpose to use every possible means which might help him to gain success in his profession.

The legal profession was one for which he was by nature entirely unfitted, and as a natural sequence success at the bar was the end to which his soul aspired.

His intellect was woolly. His power of speech was of a third-rate order. But he was endowed with a vigour of frame and of purpose that enabled him to put into strenuous words ideas and sentiments which were not of the slightest intellectual value.

He possessed what is called the gift (or the curse) of the gab. Nature had intended him for an auctioneer, but he misinterpreted the intention of Nature and set his ambition on being an advocate.

Mistaking the episodic for the essential, he had carefully copied each eccentricity of manner and symptom of originality that he detected in successful lawyers. In imitation of Sir Charles Russell he had at great inconvenience acquired a habit of taking snuff. Though his eloquence

was not by any means that of the great Irishman, he had flourished a bandana handkerchief in the face of juries as strenuously as he. Remark- ing that Sir Edward Clarke wore slight black whiskers, he apparently considered that therein, as in Samson's hair, lay the fetish of pre-eminence. He had, however, gone further ; he had grown enormous black whiskers.

Following the precedent of Mr. Charles Gill, he appeared always in a powdered wig. On the advent of Mr. Edward Carson from Ireland he had, it was said, attempted the intricacies of the brogue. Another eminent counsel he had copied by producing a volume of essays entitled "*Suaviter Scripta.*" Herein he had systematically devoted himself to the discovery of the obvious with such effect that in certain circles he had gained the reputation of an "advanced thinker with a sound judgment."

Though he had mistaken the shadow for the substance, yet so remarkable a shadow did he himself become that to many persons he appeared a most eminent personality. He was actually a perambulating plagiarism, yet by reason of having annexed the external and irrelevant traits of the great men in his profession he produced the effect of striking originality. Really, he was not a man at all ; he was rather a composite-portrait of the

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mannerisms of other people. That he should have reached the position of eminence to which his brazen lungs had in no slight measure helped him would have been impossible, had he not possessed certain admirable qualities. Perseverance and an appetite for work, combined with so strong a physique and so pachydermatous a disposition as were his, would have won a certain prominence in any branch of life. But his actual eminence could never have been attained with the materials which he held at his command had he not invented the composite-portrait theory. In a word, Sir Theodore Parker was a burlesque which was accepted by the public as a great forensic fact.

CHAPTER VII

HE TAKES MEDICAL ADVICE

THIS was the happiest moment of our hero's life. But he disguised his happiness by assuming what he believed to be the aggressive frown of the habitual cross-examiner. As worn by him, it was a development of the "bicycle face:" all his features were contracted and congested at the nose.

It was a face to which the most hardened sinner would be compelled to tell the truth even on a dark night.

So engrossed was he in manœuvring these features that he did not notice in which direction he was going.

Suddenly he experienced very violent internal pangs.

Possibly the facial distortions which he was practising had disorganized his digestive powers. Or, possibly, he was suffering from the tomato, or the caviare, or the gorgonzola, consumed the night

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before. He felt sure that in his ignorance he had played havoc with Sir Theodore Parker's interior.

Happily he was in Harley Street, the centre of the medical world, and a few steps brought him to the brass door-plate of Dr. Barton-Browne.



Having told the man-servant who opened the door that he had no appointment, but that he was Sir Theodore Parker, and wished to see Dr. Barton-Browne on a matter of urgent importance, he was shown into a dining-room filled with anxious women.

The pain had slightly abated, and he toyed

with such literature as is generally found in the ugly apartments inhabited by eminent specialists.

At length his eye caught a copy of "Who's Who?" Eagerly he turned over its pages till he found "Parker, Sir Theodore." He discovered that he had been born in 1853, at Bexley, Kent. He was the son of Harvey Parker, chairman of the Consolidated Fruit Jar Company. He had been educated at Marlborough College and Christ Church, Oxford. There he had taken his M.A. degree, and had been elected to a fellowship at All Souls. It appeared that he had been knighted "for services in connection with the Imperial Institute." He was delighted with his past.

Since 1893, he had, it seemed, represented North Bayswater in the Conservative interest.

Also, he was the author of a treatise on "The Law of Profits," and a volume of essays entitled "Suaviter Scripta."

As his wife, he had selected in the first instance Maria Martineau Gibbes, of Balham. She, unhappily, died in 1889. But in the spring of 1890 he had supplied her place with Florine B. Samp, daughter of Hamilton Samp, financier, Onehorseville, Wisconsin, U.S.A.

He felt instinctively that he had married money with Flo or Flossie. But he had no recollection either of the late Maria or of the current Florine.

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Of his marriage with Miss Samp there had been offspring.

Theodore, Lucy, Ethel, and Katherine.

He felt a paternal desire to see Theodore, Lucy, Ethel, and Katherine. He fancied that Lucy would be his favourite. Then he decided to stifle any hastily-acquired notions of favouritism. He would love them all equally.

His clubs, it appeared, were the Carlton, Garrick, Beef Steak, and the Athenæum.

His residences were 10, Deanery Street, Park Lane ; 14, Essex Court, Temple, and Normanhurst Chipping-Sodbury, Gloucestershire.

All this sounded well.

As to his recreations, they consisted of " hunting, chess, stamp-collecting, and driving (not being driven)."

On the whole, he was satisfied with himself. Clearly, he (Sir Theodore) moved with the times, He was sufficiently up to date to marry an American heiress at the second attempt.

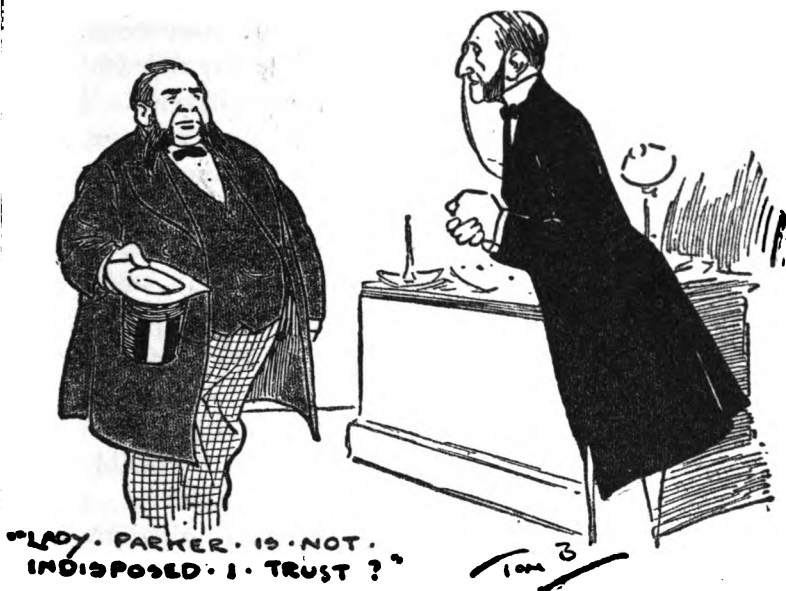
Somehow he could not bring himself to shed a tear at the sudden news of the decease of poor Maria in 1889. It was too long ago. No wonder he had forgotten all about her ! Whether she was blonde or brunette, she was nothing to him now. To the disgust of the assembled ladies who had been waiting for hours, he was

HE TAKES MEDICAL ADVICE 49

summoned to the consulting-room of Dr. Barton-Browne.

That eminent specialist received him as a stranger, but as a celebrated stranger.

(Sir Theodore was carrying "the Parker"



in his hand: its structural eccentricity was only noticeable when it was on his head.)

"Lady Parker is not indisposed, I trust?" said Dr. Barton-Browne.

"It is not on behalf of Lady Parker that I

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have called," Sir Theodore answered guardedly. "I wish to consult you about myself. That my digestive organs have lately degenerated I cannot actually say. But I am disappointed in them. They are not what I expected them to be. It is possible that I have thoughtlessly overtaxed their powers. But I want you to give me your views. I am anxious to have a new and totally unbiased opinion brought to bear upon my physique. I may or may not have certain convictions as to my organization. I brush them aside. I want you to examine my frame and general mechanism, and prescribe whatever rules of conduct with regard to eating, drinking, exercise, and recreation, which may seem right to you. Remember, I beg, that I am perfectly prepared to alter my habits at your suggestion. If you think I should avoid hunting, I will not hunt. Stamp-collecting I regard as an insane but innocuous pursuit. Chess is possibly bad for a sufferer from pulmonary complaints. I repeat that I am perfectly prepared to alter my habits entirely, should you deem such a course advisable."

Then there was a pause. The doctor seemed surprised.

"Really, Sir Theodore," said the eminent medical man, "though I should be delighted to accede to your rather universal request, still I

doubt whether I am quite the man to undertake such a responsibility. To me, you would be a new field of labour, of scientific exploration, if you will. You have paid me, indeed, a great compliment in calling, a compliment of which I am deeply sensible. For I do not think I am egotistical in assuming that you are well aware that I devote myself, and have devoted myself, for the last twenty-five years, solely to the diseases of—er—ladies. Surely, you in your condition should seek the advice of an authority on digestion rather than of an accoucheur."

Sir Theodore saw the point, and grasped it with considerable embarrassment.

He talked aimlessly about "talent," "universal genius," "world-wide reputation of Dr. Barton-Browne."

That eminent man wrote a few words on a visiting-card, and handed it to the great lawyer.

"Take this to Sir Peter Brookfield—three doors up the street. He will see you at once. You're a busy man. There is no one better than Sir Peter. He is sound—not brilliant, but sound. In our profession we mistrust the so-called 'brilliant' man. Good-day to you. My compliments to Lady Parker. I am glad that she did not require me this time; they tell me it is a fine boy."

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"It isn't in 'Who's Who?'" Sir Theodore blurted out.

"Oh, but it will be," said Dr. Barton-Browne, with elephantine badinage. "His first words will be, 'May it please your Ludship.' Good-day to you, Sir Theodore."

CHAPTER VIII

HE IS NOT HENRY VIII., AND NO ONE SAID HE WAS

To Sir Peter Brookfield he issued very much the same sort of manifesto that had paralyzed Doctor Barton-Browne ; and Sir Peter, who had reached the fossil stage of eminence and universal soundness, listened, with waxen hands tapping at one another. His elbows rested on a writing-table. The forearms and taper fingers formed a Gothic arch, through which he stared at a piece of blotting-paper in an eminently sound and reassuring manner.

At the conclusion of the lawyer's speech, he said—

"I must thank you, Sir Theodore, for your extremely lucid and admirably legal view of your own case. There are, however, several questions which I must put to you. These you will answer with as much frankness as I, myself, use in asking them. How many hours a day do you work?"

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Sir Theodore replied, "Frankly, I don't know."

"I have here a paper of which you may have heard," said the specialist. "It is called *The Secret Foe*—an admirable organ. Dealing with the question of the Long Vacation, it states these interesting facts :—

"If the plutocrats of the Bar find their work too hard for them, the remedy is in their own hands. Let them undertake less work. Let them—and this is a radical suggestion—let them only undertake such work as there is some slight possibility that their engagements will allow them to perform. Let them realize that the strain of attempting to surpass Sir Boyle Roche's bird—and be in fifteen courts at once—is beyond the capacity even of Sir Theodore Parker. Then, they could rest, say, one day a week, even during Term-time, and at no very great loss of income, whilst at some slight gain of reputation for good feeling ; for the opinion is growing amongst the public that when a Counsel has been paid a heavy fee to attend to a case, he should attend to it from A to Z.

"Men in the position of Sir Theodore Parker can afford to do this. If it were an understood thing that the acceptance of a brief by a leader guarantees his appearance right through the trial,

the biggest men at the Bar could ask—and receive—ininitely bigger fees than they do now. No one would suggest that the fees are not large enough as they stand—though infinitely smaller than those paid to leaders of the American Bar.

“Let them ask larger fees, take less work, and they will require less rest . . . and, incidentally, the Bar will profit.

“The only other brand of barrister to whom these lengthy holidays are in any sense a boon is the ultra-fashionable practitioner, the man who looms large in the public eye, who by his presence at race-meetings, at first-nights, and various other functions described in the Press, secures an advertisement otherwise denied to him by the rules of the strictest trades union in England. Of such an one the following is a sample of an average day's work :—

“6—10 : Read briefs (with or without breakfast, and a ride in the park).

“10.30—4 : Elocution (with or without result).

“4—7 : Consultations, conferences, and brief-reading.

“7.45—11 : Dinner-party or theatre, or both.

“11—2 : Club.’

“Then the writer aptly remarks—

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“Of course, he burns the candle at both ends—and in the middle. One can understand that by the time the legal year is over he must go to the seaside for three months, or the next world for ever.’”

Sir Peter gazed sternly over the Gothic arch.

“You see, you are so busy working that you have not even time to calculate how many hours you actually *do* work.”



Sir Theodore had been tense with indignation at the description of his day's work in *The Secret Foe*. He burst out—

“No constitution can stand such a strain! Am I a Hercules? Probably not. If I go on at this rate

I shall be dead in a week—perhaps sooner.”

He had only been Sir Theodore Parker for about two hours and twenty minutes. The position was so agreeable to him that he stood aghast at the idea of a premature decease.

He walked about the room in anguish.

"Do what you can," he cried piteously.
 "Tell me what to do. Save me from myself!"

"I see you are unstrung," said Sir Peter.
 "But I must beg you to exercise a little self-control. Your breakfast, now. What do you take for breakfast?"

"This morning I had two poached eggs."

"Poached eggs! Fatal. One egg—boiled, lightly boiled. If your appetite is abnormal on any occasion take a boiled egg and a half, lightly boiled—never more."

"I won't. I undertake not to."

"And for dinner! What do we drink with our dinner? Do we take a little white wine?"

Sir Theodore, whose experience of what "they" took with "their" dinner only dated from the day before, replied with absolute truth, "Berncastler Doctor."

"I thought so," said the specialist, grimly.
 "Fatal. White wine chills the system. A glass of Beaune is what your constitution demands. One glass of generous Burgundy with our dinner helps to build us up."

"I shall touch no other liquor."

"We take coffee, perhaps, after dinner?"
 said the inquisitor.

"Last night we took coffee."

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"Never touch it. Coffee heats the system."

"But I took a liqueur of Benedictine with it."

"That neutralizes the effect of the coffee," the sound specialist said gravely. "You cannot hedge with articles of diet. You must not play one off against the other. You cannot play ducks and drakes with your digestive organs."

"No."

"One or two more questions, Sir Theodore. Do you find that our stomachic troubles influence our memory?"

"Not at all." This was true. He remembered everything that had happened since yesterday.

"That is very gratifying," said Sir Peter. "By-the-by," he added, "are you an only child?"

" . . . I don't know."

This again was true. He didn't know. "Who's Who?" had not thrown any light on the matter.

"But surely you know whether you are an only son or one of forty," asked the astounded specialist, with arched eyebrows.

"My father was not a clergyman."

He knew that his father had been interested in Consolidated Fruit Jars. True, he might have been a cleric in his youth. But in his own

interests he answered the question to the best of his ability.

Sir Peter's air of incredulity annoyed him.

"I think, Sir Theodore, you have been married three times?"

"Twice," he said, angrily; "I'm not Henry VIII."

"I'm not a specialist in mental diseases," said Sir Peter, kindly, but forcibly. "Were it suggested that you were Henry VIII. you would not, of course, come to me for a decided opinion one way or the other."

"Damn it. I'm not Henry VIII.," cried Sir Theodore, angrily, "and well you know it."

He had fancied himself a Royal Duke early in the morning: so much he knew. But that it should be a moot point whether or not he believed himself to be a deceased Tudor Monarch angered him intensely.

The eminent specialist feared that there was something seriously wrong with the eminent counsel.

"No one has said that you are," he urged pacifically. "I do not suggest that you are Henry VIII. Persons suffering from *maladie des grandeurs*, or *megalomania*, never believe themselves to be that habitual husband—our leading historical widower, if I may so style him. They

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are in favour of being Mr. Bernard Shaw or the German Emperor."

Then, he asked pointedly, "As a young man, were you what is generally known as—steady?"

The question was unanswerable. Sir Theodore lost his temper. He became purple with the loss.

"Confound it, sir. I came to consult you as to my digestion, and you ask me impertinent questions about my father, and irrelevant questions about myself. You are a humbug, sir; an infernal humbug."

"Sir Theodore, you are not yourself."

"What!" shrieked the lawyer. "That's just what I am. And I've lately found it out. If I'm not Sir Theodore Parker, who is? Who the dickens is?"

The specialist had touched him on the raw.

"Of course, of course. Your condition, I may tell you, is very grave. You are suffering from overwork. However, a sea voyage, with complete rest, will put you right again. But I warn you that you are running the risk of complete nervous collapse."

"I'll be hanged if I take a sea voyage."

He strongly objected to being exported; he had only just come into the title—and himself.

"I do not wish to alarm you in the slightest degree, but you'll die in a mad-house if you don't."

The great lawyer controlled himself with a superhuman effort. He was convinced that if he



did not leave the room at once he would strangle the great digestive specialist.

"Good-day," he said, flinging two guineas through the Gothic arch. Then he seized his "Parker" and strode to the door. "Good-day."

"I shall consider it my duty," said the doctor,

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calmly, "to communicate your condition to your wife."

"What !"

"Possibly I shall be stretching a point of medical etiquette. But when I see a great forensic mind on the verge of the abyss of insanity my duty is clear. I shall do it—if you don't go."

"Don't you dare to. Don't you dare to," the K.C. cried, flourishing his "Parker" aggressively at the specialist.

Then realizing that if his wife received a letter from an eminently sound medical practitioner, stating that her husband showed symptoms of incipient insanity and of being Henry VIII., it would complicate an already complicated situation, he temporized.

"I'll go for that sea voyage," he said, as though penitent.

"That's right. That's right, Sir Theodore ; and you'll come back quite your old self, with roses on your cheeks."

When he was once more in Harley Street, his anger burst forth anew. He was in two minds as to whether or not he should return and assault Sir Peter Brookfield with considerable violence.

At length the walk in the cool evening air

began to calm him, and he realized with horror that he possessed a most terrible temper. It amounted, he felt compelled to admit, almost to homicidal mania.

Eminent though Sir Theodore unquestionably was, his digestive organs were very amateurish, and his self-control was practically nil. Though his face was no longer purple, his limbs were quivering with excitement.

When he found himself in Wigmore Street he had made up his mind not to return home that night. Of his wife Florine's character he, of course, knew nothing, but he understood sufficiently the meaning of the term "wife" to appreciate the fact that he would be called upon to give some explanation of his absence from his home in Deanery Street.

It struck him, therefore, as the more prudent that he should put up at an hotel and then go down to his chambers in Essex Court the next morning.

There he would craftily extract from his confidential clerk some idea as to how the land lay, and how he ought to lie to his wife.

So he stayed for the night at a small private hotel in Wigmore Street.

CHAPTER IX

MAINLY ABOUT WHISKERS

At breakfast next day he read a Radical half-penny paper. Suddenly he caught sight of this heading—

“EXTRAORDINARY BEHAVIOUR OF SIR THEODORE PARKER.

“Though hitherto the political opinions of the Member for North Bayswater have not always been such as to commend themselves to sane men, yet his personal conduct has invariably been beyond reproach.

“But on Tuesday night visitors at the Great Central Hotel were astounded to see the once able lawyer enter the hall wearing

A CRICKET CAP,

with a frock-coat, and talking voluble French.

“To the courteous and indefatigable manager of the hotel he gave the name of Mr. Jackson.

“During dinner he made several anti-English orations, and complained of the structural arrangements of the hotel. Yesterday morning he abandoned his assumed French nationality, and stated to several persons that he was the Duke of Connaught, and intended giving up his practice at the Bar, and embarking in the hat trade. Then he left, presumably to engage in that industry. Eventually the popular and energetic clerk in the office of the hotel received Sir Theodore’s cricket-cap, with the Duke of Connaught’s compliments.

“It is greatly to be feared that the eminent advocate’s mind has become unhinged by the efforts which he has been compelled to make with a view to understanding his political principles.

“In the event of Sir Theodore being compelled to resign his seat, Alderman Prentiss-Perkes, L.C.C., will, we understand, contest the constituency in the Radical interest.

“INTERVIEW WITH MR. SHERIDAN BURGESS.

“Mr. Sheridan Burgess, the well-known solicitor, stated to an interviewer that he met Sir Theodore in Baker Street yesterday. He was quite in his usual spirits, and chatted pleasantly with Mr. Burgess.

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“‘No, certainly he did not mention that he was a Duke. He seemed to be in his usual health,’ said the able and popular solicitor. ‘Sir Theodore chatted with his wonted affability and humour.’

“‘Was there anything odd about him, Mr. Burgess?’ asked our representative.

“‘Nothing but his hat. Sir Theodore told me that he was interested in a philanthropic society which enabled intelligent lunatics to support themselves by making hats.’

“‘He did not say that he himself was a hatter?’

“‘By no means. Now you mention it, he asked me an extraordinary leading-question, as we lawyers say. He wanted to know whether he was in Siberia. That is, of course, a bad sign. Poor fellow, he was one of my oldest friends.’

“Mr. Burgess was much affected. Our courteous and popular representative withdrew.”

Here followed a libellous portrait of the able solicitor which convicted him of being the hearty man.

* * * * *

Sir Theodore angrily crumpled up the paper, stamped on it, and fled from the hotel.

“This sort of thing must be stopped,” he cried.

Then he jumped into a hansom and told the driver to go to 14, Essex Court, Temple.

But it is unhappily impossible to drive to Essex Court. The best the cabman could do was to drop him at the entrance of a sort of "Twopenny Tube," called the Outer Temple.

This irritated Sir Theodore still further. He felt that he was being trifled with.

Purple with anger, he penetrated the "Tube" and found himself in a dilapidated well-like slum, which was, in fact, Essex Court. Had it not been inhabited by lawyers it would have been regarded as a sort of Clare Market and dealt with accordingly.

On reaching Number 14 he read with growing irritation a list of about two hundred names which were printed on the door-posts. The miscellaneous catalogue contained the names of eminent cricketers, the editor of *The Mausoleum*, Irish refugees, various cranks and dramatists, and at the bottom of the list—

Ground Floor.

SIR THEODORE PARKER.

There was no K.C. or M.P.—nothing but Parker.

He was irritated at his own modesty : everything tended to his annoyance.

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Taking the latch-key out of his pocket, he attempted to open the door. It did not seem to fit.

While he was fumbling and swearing, the door suddenly opened.

For a curate, in working costume, to look in a reliable looking-glass and see himself reflected dressed as a Field Marshal or a diver would be a somewhat novel and curious phenomenon, to be explained only by the Psychical Society amongst corporate bodies of Great Thinkers.

More astonishing, perhaps, was the experience of Sir Theodore when the door opened.

There could be no question of a looking-glass. But he undoubtedly beheld himself wearing a wig and the silken robes of one of His Majesty's Counsel.

"It's you, is it?" said the figure, whose first look of astonishment gave place instantly to indignation.

Any feeling of surprise that Sir Theodore might have felt was absorbed in extreme anger at the sight.

With violent gesticulations he cried, "What do you mean by saying 'It's you'? How dare you call me 'you'? I am you, or what you purport to be. *You* are a hideous false pretence. Otherwise you do not exist at all. That's what *you* are, confound you."

Calmly, the figure motioned to a portly pleasant-looking person, the ideal of the Briton who has at least one stake in the country.

"Bring this fanatic into my room, George," he said imperiously.

Had Sir Theodore wished to retreat, egress was barred by the Georgian adiposity.

The figure moved into a room decorated entirely with "Vanity Fair" cartoons and legal documents.

As Sir Theodore was ballooned forward by George, he felt the clerk's heavy "gent.'s" gold watch-chain (Prince of Wales' pattern) pressing into the small of his back.

Then the door shut.

Apparently, there were two Sir Theodores angrily facing each other.

One wore a wig.

The other wore a "Parker" hat.

WIG (*with intense indignation*): What is the meaning of this outrageous tomfoolery? I have heard various accounts of your extraordinary behaviour, but I did not expect that you would have the effrontery to show your face—if, indeed, it be your actual face—in my chambers.

HAT: Never mind that, sir. What I want—

WIG (*looking as Napoleon might have looked if he hadn't looked the way he did, as the saying is*):

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Do not venture to speak. Take off those whiskers, sir. How dare you assume those palpably false and woolly whiskers! You have made yourself



up as a "Vanity Fair" cartoon of me. Your appearance is a libel on myself. Remove those whiskers at once. Have I no copyright in my own features?

HAT : These whiskers are my personal and private property. They are not false. They are genuine. It is estimated by a competent authority—to be exact, a woman of the world employed in a photographer's shop in Baker Street—that they represent a growth of fifteen years. I should not dream of removing them. Have you a monopoly in whiskers? (*with intense scorn.*) Pooh, sir.

WIG : Yes, sir, by prescription. I have a sole right—not legal, but moral—in the eyes of all decent-minded men. The genuineness or otherwise of your fixtures does not affect the point. The point is this, that you have for two days been masquerading as ME in the north-west portions of London, bringing contempt and contumely on me in my constituency.

HAT (*losing all self-control*) : . . .

WIG (*with unholy calm*) : Vituperation has no effect on me. Whether your behaviour is or is not an electioneering dodge to injure me in North Bayswater, I do not at present know. But be assured that I shall strictly inquire. Posing as a Frenchman and reading disgusting novels is the least of your offences. I have never been accused of being French. As for the "Journal d'une femme de Chambre," I read it last year. It is horrible. But that, I pass over. However, made up as myself, you have pretended falsely that you are a Royal

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Duke. You have assaulted a hat-merchant in a small way of business. You have made offers of marriage to a photographer's assistant. Further, you have consulted an accoucheur as to the condition of MY digestive organs. Mine, mind you. Wasn't that enough? No. You deliberately visit Sir Peter Brookfield to inform him that I am Henry VIII. In addition to all this you wear a most shocking hat.

HAT (*astounded and pulverized*): As between man and man, and without prejudice, are you Sir Theodore Parker?

WIG (*frigidly and a little ironically*): I am.

HAT (*willing to take a fair view of the matter*): Then who the Devil am I?

WIG (*frigidly*): The Devil only knows. (*With great acidity*): It is possible that he has imparted his information to the police.

HAT (*jesting rather insipidly*): That is the quarter which produces "information received."

WIG (*ignoring cynicism and exhibiting photographs*): Do you recognize these? (*With increased acidity*): They are proofs I have received this morning.

HAT (*critically*): Some are better than others. Personally I like this one best—the one with the telescope (*as though currying favour*). On the whole, they are unequal.

WIG : None are unequal. They are ALL scandalous. Here am I on board a lugger in your hat. Here am I singing a hymn in your hat. Here am I assuming various grotesque positions in your infernal hat. Underneath each is printed "Sir Theodore Parker in the Parker Hat," as though "The Parker Hat" was a new burlesque. Pshaw, sir.

HAT (*making conversation*): Mr. Burgess seemed to think it a burlesque of a hat.

WIG : So it is. But not a burlesque of my hat. It is a burlesque of a purely mythical hat. (*George enters with a copy of a halfpenny Radical paper, hands it to WIG, and exit, glowering at HAT.*)

HAT (*collapses*).

WIG (*after perusal*): This is the last straw (*preparing to undertake literary work*). What is your name?

HAT (*truthfully*): I don't know.

WIG : What? Pshaw, sir.

HAT : Don't you pshaw me.

WIG : Who are you? Once and for all, who are you?

HAT (*truthfully*): I thought I was you.

WIG : Who paid you to think so?

HAT (*truthfully*): No one.

WIG : Have you any feelings of personal animosity towards me?

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HAT (*lying*): No.

WIG: I now give you fair warning that I shall bring an action for libel against you. Your appearance and conduct constitute a gross libel on me. Those colossal whiskers themselves are——

HAT (*ironically, and not as though asking for information*): The greater the whiskers the greater the libel? Eh?

WIG: That is a matter for the judge. It is a question of law, rather than of fact. Further, I will get an injunction restraining you from wearing them——

HAT (*pained and grieved*): For seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years?

WIG (*severely*): In perpetuity; or, failing that, I shall apply for a mandamus compelling you, your executors and assignees, to deposit them in the custody of the Court.

HAT (*aimlessly*): Without the option of a fine or the custody of the children?

WIG: Eh?

HAT (*with a tear in his voice*): Remember these are MY whiskers. Why should I pay them into Court? They are the only ones I have.

WIG (*sceptically*): So you say!

HAT (*wishing to make his position clear—if possible*): I quite realize the views that you take. I admit that you are without doubt Sir Theodore

Parker. Therefore it is clear to the meanest intellect that I am not Sir Theodore Parker.

WIG (*interrupting rudely*): Damn it! However mean your intellect may be, that fact was equally clear to you yesterday and the day before. Other people thought you were Sir Theodore Parker, and you deliberately fostered that mistaken view.

HAT (*stupidly*): Pardon me, I acted on a misapprehension. I jumped hastily at a conclusion. What that conclusion was, and how I came to jump at it, I shall now explain to you at considerable length. Be seated.

WIG (*inhospitably*): No, I shall not be seated. I am going into Court now.

HAT (*fairly and squarely*): You have misjudged me, and I insist on giving my explanation.

WIG (*peremptorily*): That you can do in your statement of defence. I am a busy man.

HAT (*as though making an honourable amendment*): It is possible that you have been put to considerable inconvenience. But look at me!

WIG: That is just what I decline to do. You are a blot on the landscape.

HAT (*weeping*): I know. No one regrets it more than I. But, believe me, I didn't want to be a blot. Circumstances have been against me. They have conspired to mislead my judgment.

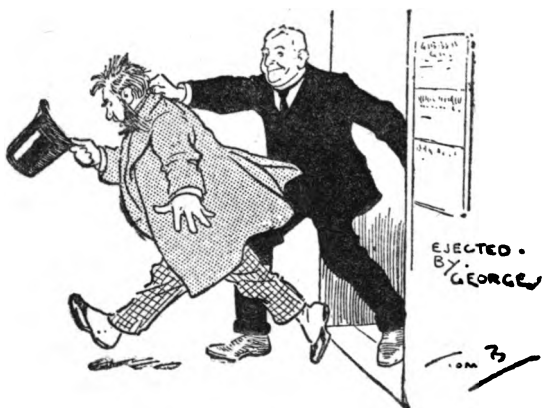
WIG (*with a suggestion of Solon at his best, with*

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just a dash of Lycurgus): The names of your fellow-conspirators?

HAT: They are not people. They are circumstances.

WIG (*losing patience and ringing bell*): Either you are mad or you are insane. That is a matter for a jury.



HAT (*humbly*): All right, I'll go.

WIG (*pleasantly*): But don't imagine for a moment that the matter will rest here.

HAT (*wearily*): Can't you understand that I was looking for my ego, and that you turned out to be my alter ego?

WIG (*very wittily*): Then I advise you to alter your ego—whatever it is.

(HAT is ejected by George.)

CHAPTER X

HE IS NOT SIR THEODORE PARKER, AND HE, THEREFORE, DETERMINES TO DABBLE IN THE OCCULT

WITH the pinnacle hat and the huge pointed whiskers, he looked like a monstrous black starfish stranded in the middle of Essex Court.

He felt more completely indefinite than he had ever felt before—a shadow, disowned by its substance. Had anybody made him the offer of being a starfish holding a recognized position, and so settling the matter once and for all, he would gladly have come to terms then and there. But no such offer was forthcoming.

Barristers in robes going to the Courts, Express-Messenger boys in uniform, devising pursuits to avoid going anywhere, looked at him with incredulous surprise.

He was clutching at the situation—such as it was,—whatever it was: and the wretched little man grasped that, so far from being a personality,

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he was merely a burlesque of an individual with whom he was on the worst of terms.

He was acting Guy Fawkes to a Guido who was yet alive, and who objected very strongly to the entire performance.

He felt a sensation of sympathy for the Guido. He was infringing on the Guido's undoubted copyright in his own appearance. For the real Sir Theodore had, apparently, made a corner in whiskers—as far as the legal world was concerned.

It pleased him to find that he possessed sufficient good feeling to understand what a nuisance he had been to Sir Theodore.

Had he been Sir Theodore—as he *had* been for a few blissful hours—he wouldn't have liked it himself, would he? No. The gentlemanly emotions that he discovered in himself gave him very real pleasure.

He felt truly sorry for Sir Theodore, to whom he had evidently caused great pain. Having penetrated the tube, and walked some distance along the Strand, he determined to avoid inconveniencing him in the future, and he decided to have his luxuriant growth of natural ivy amputated.

Whilst waiting in the barber's shop he played with the early-morning edition of an evening paper.

“WHAT IS BEFORE YOU?” caught his

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eye. That was just what he wanted to know. He tried to find out. So he read :

"When John James Stokes distributed amongst the public circulars headed 'What is before you?' did he see his own future? We wonder. Probably not. The prisoner Stokes, who wore a tightly buttoned frock-coat and a fancy vest, described himself as a retired botanist. At the Thames Police Court, yesterday, he was charged, on remand, with obtaining money by pretending to tell fortunes.

"The following are extracts from his circular :—

Having the gift of second sight, I possess the power to make known to you your future life, and to clear up any mysteries in your past.

No matter what the thing may be, or how secret it may be, write me in the fullest confidence, and I will reveal matters that are completely hidden from you."

This met our hero's case.

"Should you experience any difficulty in becoming engaged or settled in life, write to me, and in the strictest confidence and secrecy I will explain certain things to you, that no matter what your age may be, what your position may be, or what your appearance may be, will enable you to become engaged, and married, to the person you desire."

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Here was a person who could be a real help. He would certainly have two shillings' worth from John James Stokes.

"For a revelation of your future, send colour of hair, eyes, and date of birth; a P.O. for 2s. should be enclosed with all letters, together with an addressed envelope."

Why not?

It was stated that at Mr. Stokes's premises several hundred letters were found, including thirty from a Christian Scientist Duchess, these latter being unfit to be read in open court. Hers were all about her past. His letters in reply contained proposals of marriage.

The magistrate predicted that the next three months of John James Stokes's future would be spent in gaol.

Magistrates' predictions are generally right.

There was bad luck! Stokes was busy. Otherwise, he could have been of assistance in many ways.

"Next please," said the barber.

He was the next, and he gave the barber a wholesale order.

When the contract was completed, the real Sir Theodore Parker would not have recognized his late *locum tenens* in the little man who walked out into the Strand without a whisker to his name.

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But for the chenille eyebrow-fittings, like woolly caterpillars, his face was a blank sheet of paper.



He was a changed man. Samson, after the Delilah treatment, was not more altered.

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In spite of the delightful sensation of warmth that comes from the consciousness of having done the "right thing" at no great personal inconvenience to ourselves, the little wanderer felt very miserable. Everything was against him, and poor Mr. Stokes, who might have told him so many things that he wanted sorely to know, was in prison.

At Piccadilly Circus his notice was attracted by a sandwich-man with a placard :

MADAME BEANO.

TELLS THE TRUTH,
THE WHOLE TRUTH,
AND NOTHING BUT
THE TRUTH.

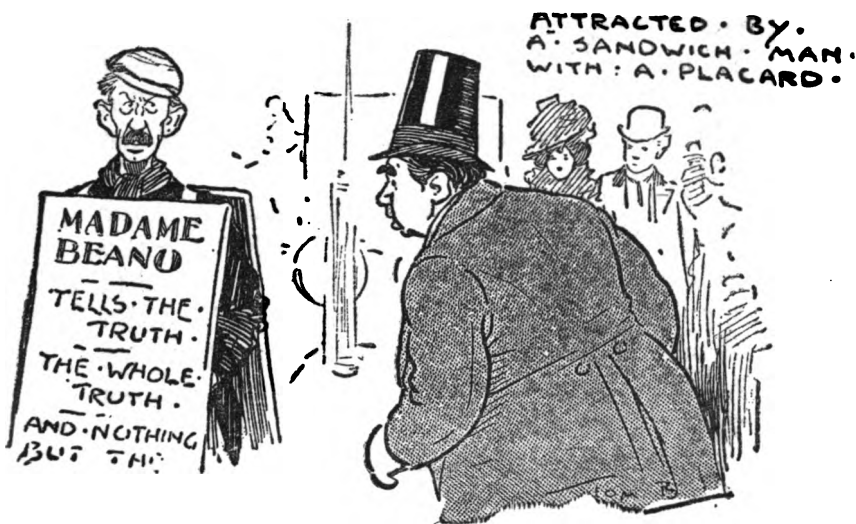
Here was a sort of female George Washington. The great American as a boy had made a world-wide reputation by his inability to lie on a trivial matter of arboriculture.

But Madame Beano beat him at his own game ; she was ahead even of prisoner Stokes.

Not only did she tell the truth in its glorious entirety, in season and out of season, but she went to the expense of publishing the truth about the truth, and how she told it.

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On further inspection of the advertisement of this monument of veracity, he ascertained that she told the Truth at 408, New Bond Street, between the hours of 12 and 4, and that her terms for telling it were one guinea a sitting.



That is cheap, really, for the whole truth, with no trimmings.

Think of it! To have the entire run of veracity for the value of a box of pills.

Therefore he decided to go to Madame Beano, and take the complete course. As he was no longer a great lawyer, he did not realize the legal

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distinction between telling the Truth for a guinea and telling fortunes for a florin.

Or why Stokes, the ex-Botanist of Whitechapel, was in gaol, and La Belle Beano, of Bond Street, was at large.

Had he been a great lawyer he would, of course, have known that criminal law is regulated by geographical considerations, and that Bond Street is not Whitechapel, and not a "place" at all within the meaning of the Act—whatever that may mean.

In his ignorance he took the view that prisoner Stokes had infringed the law by charging two shillings to domestic servants for what was worth a guinea to the public at large. But what about Beecham? Beecham was compelled to admit that his products were worth a guinea a box, and yet he sold them for 1s. 1½d.

Where were the police?

CHAPTER XI

MADAME BEANO

HAVING made up his mind to peer into the past, he decided to take a little light luncheon, during which he could prepare a list of questions for administration to the lady who had made a corner in truth.

So he entered the Café Royal.

The original light luncheon scheme was, however, amended and improved and generally made more comprehensive.

By three o'clock it seemed practically complete, and he leaned back in his chair for purposes of meditation. On a menu-card he wrote out the following list of interrogatories :—



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1. Am I eminent, and if so, how ?
2. Where do I live, and why do I live there ?
3. If married, state shortly and in your own words to whom.
4. If not, am I single ?
5. And why ?

He was rather pleased with these questions. Of course he did not intend to throw them bluntly at Madame Beano. They were merely to refresh his memory.

But they contained an intelligent brusqueness which was suggestive of cross-examination—doubtless a relic of the period when he had been Sir Theodore Parker. The intelligent brusqueness pleased him. Then, flushed with the joys of the present, he reflected on his past.

He divided his existence into æons, viz.:—

- A. The Prehistoric Age.
- B. The Ducal Era.
- C. The Parker Period.
- D. The Renaissance.

This systematic arrangement he considered workmanlike ; and he felt that it would be convenient for reference.

After these mental labours he had a fourth glass of Benedictine. He was delighted to find how much he appreciated this pleasant liqueur.

Under its influence he prepared a supplementary list of questions :—

5 (a.) What is my income, and where can I get it ?

6 (b.) Am I happy in my married life (if I have a married life) ?

7 (c.) Tell me now, not necessarily for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith, who am I ?

8 (d.) Is there anything I like better than Benedictine, and, if so, what ?

9 (e.) What is my name, if not N or M, and who gave me this name ?

But, somehow, the supplementary list disappointed him. It struck him as lacking cohesion, and as being unworthy of his undoubted capacity. It was not as masterly as the original list of questions. So he tore it up.

It was now a quarter past three ; and Madame Beano closed her Truth Distributing Agency at four.

So he paid his bill, and took a cab to 408, Bond Street.

By a stroke of luck, which may seem almost incredible, he had selected the only genuine *clairvoyante* in London. But then it must be remembered that hitherto he had been entirely unfortunate.

A man who has completely lost his identity

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and his luggage in a railway accident, who has had to abandon the belief that he is the greatest tragedian of our day, who, after enjoying the possession of a Royal Dukedom for a few minutes in broad daylight, and after being for a short time one of the leaders of the English Bar, is suddenly thrust back into oblivion, may, not unreasonably, anticipate the advent of a favourable freak of fortune.

Madame Beano was that freak. Amongst the hundreds of seers who make a living out of the credulous, Madame Beano is perhaps the sole prophetess who really reads the future. The others only read between the lines—where there is no reading matter.

But she peruses the actual Script of Destiny, and possesses signed photographs of celebrities to prove it.

To describe a person's past is not a matter of extraordinary difficulty. On each of us, the labour or pleasure of life has set its seal. And a solicitor in good practice, an Old Bailey barrister, an average medical man, and Warder Cook at Marlborough Street Police Court, can read the imprint on the wax. Character can be told by one's finger-nails, by one's tailor's bills, by the palm of one's hand, or by a cursory examination of one's liver (under the Röntgen rays), or, more

accurately still, perhaps, after one's decease ; but few people are willing to die in order to have their character investigated at a post-mortem examination. They prefer to go on living, heedless of the obstacles which they are placing in the way of the expert character-delineator.

The fact that Madame Beano's mother, Ada Rivers, was a house-parlour-maid in Golden Square, that Madame Beano's father was an acrobat, and that Mr. Rivers was a jobbing builder who died of drink, scarcely bears on the matter in hand.

Madame Beano herself, having early developed an inherited tendency to a skittish career, became a *succès de fiasco* under her own mismanagement at the Opera Comique in very light and far from comic opera. It was only then that, finding no pleasurable retrospect in her own past, she developed a talent for looking into other people's futures.

"Madame" Beano was a courtesy title which she conferred upon herself, for general merit, in the same way that ventriloquists are always subalterns in the British Army, people who play with parachutes are "professors," and conjurers are "Doctors" or "Signors," according to whether they are of Scotch or Irish origin.

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“Beano” she adopted because it was Italian and familiar, yet by no means vulgar.

It was a bad year when she made less than £1500.

She was not a good woman.

CHAPTER XII

DABBLING

WHEN the Self-seeker was shown into Madame Beano's Truth Factory he found a massive woman reclining in a bentwood rocking-chair. She was covered with draperies like a sofa in a studio ; her face showed signs of good living on the anxieties of other people ; she wore large quantities of expensive Titian-red hair, and was altogether a very comfortable looking woman.

While he was settling financial matters she allowed her business smile of the sorrow caused by omniscience to mingle with the pigments on her face. She took his guinea, and motioned him to a seat. Then she wandered about the room as though she were all soul.

"What can I do for you ?" she asked. "Of course, I don't tell fortunes. That is against the law, you know," she added, with an arch smile.

"I am aware of that," he answered. "But I

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am in a difficulty, a great difficulty. It's about the past."



She sat down by his side in a capacious low chair. Her background consisted of a piano,

palms, books on palmistry, and miscellaneous ART.

"Whose past?"

"My own."

She stared out into the future. Then she looked cunningly at him :

"Do you want to know anything about a woman?"

"Not directly. I want to know about myself. All about myself."

"I see two women : a dark woman with raven locks and a fair woman with flaxen hair. One will cross your path in a short time ; the other, who is more dangerous, will never cross your path. Beware of her."

"Look here, Madame, I don't want to know about women, and paths, and things. I want to know about my past."

She stared intently into his face. "I cannot tell the past without revealing the future. For the future is the corollary of the past."

"Confound it," he said irritably, "the past comes first, and I want it first. Let's have things in their natural order. When once I get hold of what's happened, then I can look after myself."

She answered : "That is a very unusual request, but, of course, I must accede to it if you insist.

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However, as you deny me the assistance of your future, I shall be compelled to use the crystal in order to ascertain your past. That will be a guinea extra." He paid it.

She produced a small glass ball from the velvet lining of a Japanese lacquered casket. On the casket was the Royal Dragon of Japan, wrought in gold with jade-green scales.

She turned the globe in her fat white fingers until it was in an angle which would reveal her patient's past.

Somehow the globe was not in working order : so she burnt scented things to help it.

Suddenly she cried, "You are not what you appear to be."

She was almost hysterical at the discovery ; he was unmoved.

"You have mistaken your vocation in life."

"Three times," he said. "Once I thought I was an actor. Then I wanted to be a burden on the tax-payer. After that I fancied that I was a forensic genius."

"And each time," she said with conviction, "you were WRONG. Was it not so ?"

"It was."

She massaged the glass globe for a little longer.

He became intensely interested. The woman was a marvel.

She stared into the future again.

This time, she seemed to mesmerize it.

"In your life the expected has not always happened," she said, sadly. "I see here in the crystal a blurred picture—all is vague, hazy, disturbed. There is confusion."

"The collision!" he cried. "This is astounding!"

"I see," she went on, without taking any notice of how astounded he was. "The accident has taken place. There is a running to and fro. There are cries of 'Help, help!' People are rushing up and down."

"That is not in a photographer's shop in Baker Street?" he asked reflectively.

"No, no."

"Upon the platform?"

"The railway accident has been fraught with disaster," was her answer.

The wonderful woman continued: "Some of the poor passengers have been wounded, mangled to death, and, in many cases, killed!"

A wave of pain passed over her pigments.

In her anguish the fresco almost cracked in two places.

"Ah!" she cried. "I see you worn and white. Out of the carriage you come. Killed? No. Perhaps? No. You are NOT killed."

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She almost fainted with the sensation of relief.

"Thank Heaven you are safe!" she cried. Then she went on. "But you are wan and white. Your face is pale. Blackness is on each side. Dead black of death!"

"Yes, at that time I wore whiskers, dead black whiskers!" he explained.

"Why didn't you come to me to warn you against that?"

"What! the whiskers?"

"No, the accident."

She was tired from her inspection of the globe and rested, looking curiously at him.

"What you have already told me, Madame, is marvellous!"

He was alarmed at her prowess. Martin le Laboureur had made Louis XVIII. shiver in his shoes by telling him a secret known to the King alone. There was only one episode as far as he knew in the Self-seeker's life, and this woman had told it to him at once!

It is not extraordinary that he was alarmed; this woman knew all. Let her conceal nothing.

"What I want you to tell me, Madame, is this," he continued; "for purposes of my own, I am anxious to ascertain who I am and what I am. You have told me about this accident. Your wonderful success in that respect

convinces me that you will have no difficulty in telling me—my name and address.”

There was bathos !

To hide her indignation at so preposterous a question she burnt a few supplementary smells.

They were not harmonious.

“You are consulting a *clairvoyante*—not a Court Guide,” at length she answered haughtily.

“Nevertheless, I want you to tell me who I am.”

“And if I said that you’re a detective, what then ?” she said, rising to her full height—and breadth.

“You would be wrong—probably.”

One of the perfumes was getting the better of the others.

It was the worst perfume.

“Anyhow, I’ve not told you anything about the future. There can’t be any mistake on that point.”

The defeated smells rallied. They seemed to have a chance.

“When you suggest that I am a detective, you are not altogether inaccurate ; as a matter of fact, I am trying to detect myself.”

She looked at him with the sort of expression he had noticed on the faces of persons engaged in the hat or photographic trades.

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She stammered out, "You will take a long voyage—by sea—soon, I think—soon, I hope."

"My dear Madame, I beg of you to confine yourself simply and solely to my past."

"You are different from other people," she languished.

This statement soothed him.

"Yes, I know, and that's what I want to stop. How clever of you to find out!"

Then, from some reason or other—lunch, perhaps—he made a clean breast of it.

"Two days ago I met with the accident you have so ably described. In that accident I lost my memory. Now, I have not the vaguest idea of who I am. You discovered that I had reasons for believing that I was a Duke. If I am a Duke, I am, at any rate, not the Duke that I believed myself to be. Also, I am not Sir Theodore Parker. And, for reasons which would not be convincing to you—now that I have been shaved—I am perfectly satisfied that I am neither an eminent tragedian, a Catholic priest, nor an American jockey. These somewhat negative data I can place before you. But from internal evidence, if I may so style it, from various indications both of manner and mode of thought and speech, I am of the unbiased opinion that in some walk of life, some elevated walk of life, I am

a not unprominent figure. I wish you to specify the walk. I ask you to identify the figure."

Impressed by the earnestness of the little man, Madame Beano sat down, and then the greatness of the woman came out.

She said—a thing which no *clairvoyante* had ever said before—that she could not undertake his case.

Whatever his life might have been he had no sort of knowledge of that life. Who he was—he did not himself know. Clairvoyance had its limits, like electricity, or faith, or company promotion. She could not tell him, poor weak woman as she was, what he had no means of knowing himself. Could she—though she had been complimented by two crowned heads, eight suffragan bishops, three prebendaries, rural deans *ad lib.*, and several Irish Members of Parliament—could she? No, of course not? I ask you.

She was right; but her nobility lay in admitting it.

Why! even Monsieur Bertillon could not, by his admirable system of measurement, produce the *dossier* of a new-born babe.

And she, too, had nothing to work on: all honour to her that she declined to work.

The Self-seeker was bitterly disappointed, but he was far from denying the truth and candour of her statements.

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Still, he thought it was worth his while to talk a little about himself, and so he asked permission to tell the story of his life again.

She felt that it ought to come out in monthly parts, on the instalment plan—you pay your eight-pence down ; and the non-delivery begins at once.

But she had got two guineas out of him ; and he had his way.

By the time that he had recounted one half of the facts which have been accurately set down in these pages, she gave him a whisky and soda, as it was after office hours, and she was rather bored with the story. By the time that he had inaccurately described the remainder of the facts which have been here recounted he had consumed two additional whiskies (with sodas to match).

Then she played the piano to him a little.

When he had sufficiently recovered for her to sing, she sang—a beautiful song of love, and life, and fishes. This song was *Æsop* up to date, telling the story of an oyster's love for a mermaid.

The whole thing was intensely beautiful, and true to life ; the name of the lyric was "The Unfortunate Oyster."

It began :—

" A pretty little mermaid
With a flighty turn of mind,
Used to flirt with all the fishes
Of whatever shape or kind.

From the sturgeon to the gudgeon,
Every fish was in her net,
But she left them all in dudgeon
To royster
With an oyster,
Whom she called her bearded pet."

And it ended horribly for the oyster.
That ought to have warned him, but it didn't.



Her voice was flashy and flat, yet she had a sense of humour.

The music was all that an oyster could want, pretty, volatile, and sensuous, and the Self-seeker felt sure that he had found himself. But he had another whisky and soda to make sure.

When he was quite sure, he proposed marriage. She rejected him with **CONTUMELY**. He demanded an explanation.

Madame Beano, instead of saying that her heart was another's, a fair man's with flaxen locks, or a dark gentleman's with raven hair, as the case might or might not be, followed her invariable practice and told the truth.

(That great and noble woman never hesitated to tell the truth, no matter how unpleasant it might be to other people.)

She said that, for all she knew, or for all he knew, he might already be a married man with offspring. He admitted that possibility with disgust. Further, she stated it was by no means certain that he was eminent in any walk of life.

With that passion for accuracy which was one of her leading characteristics she maintained that he might be a very undesirable husband.

How if he turned out to be a fugitive from Justice (*malgré lui*, of course), or a fraudulent trustee of a person or persons unknown?

(She regarded this condition of nonentity as a technical definition of practitioners in some horrible branch of crime.)

It was, indeed, possible that his past was appalling, that he had ceased to remember it because it was too terrible to remember. The mind revolted at and rejected so heavy a load upon the cells of memory.

He angrily admitted the truth of all she said,

but alleged that she was taking an unfair advantage of him.

She maintained not, and added an appendix to the matter :

“Of course I am sure that you’re a very nice man, and a kind gentleman. But, by the laws of physiognomy, I don’t think you would make a good husband. The narrow space between the eyebrows shows that you are a man of very violent temper.”

He began to show the violent temper without any assistance from his eyebrows.

“The peculiar formation of your lips tends to prove that you are vain, selfish, and somewhat tetchy when roused.”

He got roused.

Then he corroborated the testimony of his peculiar facial formation by a little language and a few gestures.

But she bore with him, and analyzed him, and made him furious.

“Of all the ——, upon my soul you ——. I have come here to have my past But you —— insult me —— to my face —— about my face.”

They did not part friends, nor, indeed, acquaintances.

CHAPTER XIII

HE ACCEPTS THE HOSPITALITY OF A STRANGE MAN

It turned out of Oxford Street at intense speed.

In appearance the thing was far worse than any portent hinted at in the Book of Revelations. But as a matter of fact it was merely an armoured train fitted with Belleville boilers and surrounded by unpleasant atmospheric conditions. It was painted robin's-egg-blue, and contained a mass meeting of miscellaneous financiers dressed as yachtsmen, who contemplate one violent storm, a land breeze or two, and perhaps an equinoctial gale accompanied by hail and sleet. One apparently was going to a fancy dress ball as a Polar bear.

The yachtsmen with the tarpaulins called it a motor-car.

However, the monstrous machine overthrew an unfortunate fellow, whose only crime was that he happened to be a pedestrian, and was not protected by a bullet-proof cuirass or some portable

form of armour-plating, without which no prudent citizen should stir abroad.

The Self-seeker saw the whole thing, and marvelled and shouted incoherently.

Some prejudiced spectators who did not own motor-cars, and were habitual pedestrians, shrieked unkind things at the yachtsmen and the Polar bear.

The motor-car was evidently not a French machine of the latest pattern.

Had it been filled with the newest mechanical devices for the destruction of pedestrians, all would have been well. For the modern French automobile is provided with huge grappling irons. Directly a man is run over they automatically project beneath the car and seize and mangle the victim. At the same instant a phonograph shouts (also automatically) into the ears of the dying, "*Imbécile, Conspuez ! à bas ! Vive les Boers !*" or any other neat form of invective or political maxim which the proprietor may select. But as a rule English motorists prefer to do their own shouting at those misguided persons who prefer to do their own walking.

When the armoured train had been stopped and it was found that the Belleville boilers were not seriously injured, and a policeman had taken the name and address of the yachtsman at the

helm, and a great many people had said a great many things—mostly irrelevant—it turned out that the victim was not seriously hurt.

Then the yachtsmen congratulated him, and



told him how lucky he was, and what a fool he was, and how much more frightened than hurt he was, and shivered their timbers in motor-car talk.

The Self-seeker behaved like the other intelligent spectators, and got in the way with the best of them.

He also gave some advice which nobody took.

But one of the spectators seemed to appreciate the value of the advice, and complimented the donor upon it.

The stranger was a tall well-dressed man, with a frank, open face, and considerable powers of conversation—but not quite enough h's for the entire menu.

Their conversation was mainly about nothing, but it was that sort of cheery common-sense talk that is often the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

They walked down Bond Street together, each apparently pleased with the other.

By the time they had reached Piccadilly the strange man mooted the great drink question.

"Come along with me to Jimmie's and have a whisky and soda."

Our friend agreed—because he had a sort of feeling that the strange man would take no refusal.

When they got to St. James's Restaurant, and were having their drinks, the hastily formed friendship seemed to mature and grow rapidly mellow.

The strange man told anecdotes of men and

women. He mentioned the *Pink 'un* and De Wet like a well-informed man about town.

"You a Londoner?" he asked at length, with the courteous intention of giving the other a chance to speak about himself a little.

"In a sense, yes. That is, I have never to my knowledge been out of London."

"What?"

"That is, never further than Chalk Farm Station."

The strange man gazed curiously at him.

"Eh? London's good enough for you, is it?" he said, heartily; "well, between me and you and the door-post, as the saying is, London is good enough for me."

Having uttered the Moderate view of metropolitan politics he told the Self-seeker that he wanted to buy a buttonhole at the stall outside, and would be back in a second.

When he returned he was putting a photograph into his pocket.

But he was not wearing a buttonhole.

The Self-seeker commented on the fact.

"You didn't buy that buttonhole?" said he courteously to his friend.

"No, I couldn't get what I wanted. But I've found something that I've been wanting for some little time."

He gazed hard at the Self-seeker.

"Did you find that photograph outside?" asked the little man, apparently taking an interest in a subject which did not interest him the least bit in the world.

"No, I've found the original of the photograph."



"A lady?" asked the Self-seeker, with a suggestion of doggyness which he hoped would be pleasing to the strange man who told anecdotes about men and women.

"None of your bluff," was the strange answer of the strange man. "The game's up, and you know it."

"What game? I don't understand you. We are not playing a game. We are merely having drinks at your expense. If you are anxious to avoid payment, I am prepared to toss you as to which of us shall incur the liability. But I do not like your tone. Your tone is aggressive and distasteful."

"Are you coming?" asked the strange man, with a comprehensive leer, which seemed to imply a complete knowledge of our hero's past, mode of thought, and religious convictions.

Few things are, perhaps more galling than for a man who has no sort of data about his individuality to meet suddenly a strange man with a leer of that sort.

"No. I am not coming. You are presuming on a slight acquaintance. Why should I come, sir? And where? As I have said, words fail me to express accurately my dislike to your tone."

In spite of the dogmatic utterance, the Self-seeker felt an inexplicable sensation of uneasiness in the presence of the strange man.

"You had better come. It's up—absolutely up."

"I do not know what is up. And I absolutely decline to come. I intend remaining here and having a liqueur of Benedictine, of which I am exceedingly fond."

The strange man bore with him greedily.

Nodding his head with the air of a connoisseur, who had discovered a genuine Buhl Table in a shop in Tottenham Court Road, he said—

“I know you.”

“You do? Do you?”

“Yes. Don’t make no mistake. Yes.”

“Then, who the devil am I?”

“Is the name of Charles James Briscoe new to you?”

“Quite,” answered the little man. The name of Briscoe was absolutely new to him.

“Well, it’s not new to me,” said the strange man hastily.

“There is nothing particularly novel in your friend’s name. And it does not interest me. But, as I said before, I don’t like your tone. And the more I see of it, the less I like it. Your tone, my dear sir, is not what it should be. I gather that you see some fancied resemblance in me to your friend, Mr. Briscoe, whom you apparently dislike. Let us leave it at that. I am not Mr. Briscoe, and I am not your friend. To be accurate, I am merely a chance acquaintance. Good night to you, sir.”

The strange man became stranger than ever.

He fixed the Self-seeker with absorbing eyes.

The frankness of his face had vanished.

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The openness of his expression was gone. He became a hard, strong man.

"I am Detective-Inspector Clegg. You must come with me."

The Self-seeker felt that he could not deny either the statement or the prophecy. It seemed as though his bones were quivering spirals. Sheer, cold fright pressed against his heart.

"What is it? What do you mean? What for?"

"Don't make a scene here. It won't help you. You can finish your drink."

But he didn't want to. More dazed, even, than he had been after the railway accident, he shuffled from the bar. The consciousness of guilt struck him between the eyes. He was as one weighed down by the unearned increment of Sin.

He refused the strange man's offer of a cab.

As he walked along Piccadilly he had a crazy hope that he might meet a motor-car—the lethal sort.

A turning on the right brought them under the gas lamp of Vine Street Police Station.

Then he felt that he was hungry, gave up all hope, and began to believe in Fate (which is an aggravated form of Bad Luck).

CHAPTER XIV

THE STRANGE MAN TIPS THE WINK, AND IS ADMIRER BY HIS COLLEAGUES

THE place was horribly clean.

The police-station had all the sanitary chilliness that public-school buildings on the first day of term present to an unpopular schoolboy.

Any educated felon who enters a police-station (in custody) for the first time in his life is struck by the entire lack of cosiness in his surroundings.

Sweetness and light are about and around him, but the general effect is cold.

When our friend entered Vine Street he felt numb and frozen and uncommunicative—a condition in which no prisoner is tempted to pour forth, spontaneously, passionate professions of his guilt.

He did not feel that he was amongst friends.

No man ever volunteers a statement (which may be taken down in writing) unless he is convinced that he is amongst friends.

True, there were several pleasant-looking

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fellows loafing about, but they were fitted with WHISTLES and TRUNCHEON-CASES.

And though they doubtless had many firm friends of their own, they did not seem friendly to our hero.

A drunken woman—a pirate of the streets—in purple and fearful language, was being huddled to a cell.

The place was as decorous as a People's Wash-house, and just about as unattractive.

(Between the ceremonies attending crime and the circumstances leading to cleanliness a really poor person, with an open mind, and no atavism to guide him, must be on the horns of a very serious dilemma.)

The eminent detective behaved as though tipping the wink to the uniform-men who were standing round. They tipped it back in a modified form. For they all had a proper feeling of respect for Clegg, who, on a salary of £250 a year, was known to spend at least a hundred and thirty on himself and those who were temporarily near and dear to him, and to lose quite fifteen pounds a month "racing" (which term means backing losers and being hospitable).

"Corker" Clegg was much respected in the force, and his wife was employed in Peter Robinson's, merely by the powers of his personality.

He steered the Self-seeker into a private office. Before the door was shut, the murmur had circulated :

“Briscoe !”

“He’s got Briscoe !”

“Clegg has got Briscoe !”

The news was conveyed instinctively, not from one to the other—but to each policeman the personality of Clegg exhaled the word “Briscoe.”

They all knew that Briscoe was caught ! They knew who Briscoe was, and they admired the man who had caught him !

Then the door closed. The inspector-on-duty (who looked like a beaver, on a busy day) had ceased to take an interest in the betting news. He put down the halfpenny evening paper on the table, took off his glasses, and sat upright in his chair.

His whole face expressed in pantomime the word “Briscoe !”

Clegg nodded—with a certain proper pride.

The Self-seeker was a huddled mass of inert perplexity.

“Anything to say ?” asked the inspector, after looking at him keenly for a few seconds.

“I don’t know. I don’t know what to say.”

Yesterday he had fair hopes of being Solicitor-General of England. To-day he didn’t know what to say to an inspector of police.

"Prisoner."

(The Self-seeker shuddered.)

"Prisoner, I must warn you that anything you may say will be taken down in writing"—the inspector prepared to engage in the production of literature—"and used against you at your trial."

The wretched prisoner pulled himself together. "How do you know that anything I may say can be used against me? I may say something in my favour."

He didn't know what he could possibly say in his favour, or against himself, for the matter of that; his words were mere bravado.

"It will be taken down in writing all the same," repeated the inspector, who was on duty, and quite prepared to write. (Eight per cent. of the farcical comedies refused by theatrical managers are written by inspectors-on-duty on duty.)

"I suppose you don't deny that you are Charles James Briscoe?"

"I don't deny anything. I can't deny anything," he answered aimlessly.

This terrible admission was taken down in writing and altered. The sense, of course, was preserved.

It eventually read, "I can't deny anything. I admit everything."

The miserable, muddled prisoner added, "I am a miserable man, God help me!"

This was developed into "The prisoner further



stated that deceased was a miserable woman, and he used blasphemous language."

"What have I done? Tell me, what I have

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done?" Limp as a rag, incredulous of his surroundings, he uttered a hopeless cry.

The inspector snapped with a trap-like mouth, "Murder!"

He then proceeded to read the charge out at length. But he conveyed no scintilla of meaning to the astounded person before him; the hideous accusation fell on an intelligence that was numbed with fear.

No word came from the prisoner.

But the two syllables "Murder" had made pinpoints of his eyes.

"Anything to say?"

No answer.

"Take him away. I congratulate you."

CHAPTER XV

HE DECIDES TO TAKE LEGAL ADVICE

OUR friend passed a terrible night in his cell. He did not attempt to sleep. He was far too busy thinking. At first he walked automatically up and down. Then he sat on the bed with his head between his hands, and revolved futile and chaotic thoughts. Every now and then he was conscious that eyes were staring at him through the rabbit-hutch-like opening in the door. The word "Briscoe" was reverently hissed. He felt as though he was a rather rare animal confined in some Zoological Gardens. There were moments when he, in his harassed perplexity, almost hoped that he really was an animal of some sort—of any sort. As he pressed his hands to his temples it seemed to him quite possible that by some extraordinary process of transmigration he might have developed into a rare specimen of the animal kingdom—a Briscoe, a Briscoe *ferox* or a Briscoe *bimetallicus*. Nothing would astonish him now.

Within three days he had been a great tragedian, a prince of the blood, an eminent advocate. Should he suddenly develop into a kangaroo, well—he had expected it all along !

He was perfectly prepared to say to himself, "I told you so." Still, he had a certain feeling of self-respect. If he was to be a kangaroo he sincerely trusted that he would belong to a rare and properly appreciated species. There are Kangaroos and kangaroos.

He was intentionally blinding himself. He sought an imaginary refuge in the Animal Kingdom. But in his heart of hearts he was only too well aware that he was a mere man kept in a prison with a view to his extermination, and not a rare specimen of the brute creation detained in captivity in order to propagate its species.

Slowly he cured himself of this temporary attack of megalomania, and when he was quite cured he became angry.

The natural instinct of all angry persons is to ring a bell. He found a bell and rang it.

Something or other came to the rabbit-hutch. The captive saw a section of a custodian's face.

"Upon my soul, upon my soul, what the devil is all this about? Who is this Briscoe?" cried the prisoner.

"'Arf of it. 'Arf of it."

"What do you mean by that expression? You are a constable on duty. It is your duty to express yourself in comprehensible language. 'Arfovit' is unintelligible."

The constable on duty whistled saucily by way of reply.

"I have asked you a simple question, and I demand a simple answer."

The constable said, "Come over."

"Do you mean to insult me, sir? Situated as I am, it must be evident that it is impossible for me to come over. Your invitation is absurd; I suppose it is meant to be ironical."

"Look here," said the section of the face. "If it wasn't you as was talking, I should shut the wicket and no more parley; but seeing as it is you, and as I knows as how it is you, and you knows as how I knows, I asks you what's the gaine? Doctor? Fainting fits?"

These outrages on the King's English were perpetrated in a tone of callous kindness which increased the wrath of the captive. His purple face peered through the rabbit-hutch.

"Who is Briscoe?" he cried. "What is Briscoe? I insist on an answer. Constable, do your duty. Tell me who is Briscoe?"

"All right; don't raise Cain. I see it. I'll say that you was all unstrung and hysterical, if you'll

only keep quiet. If your lay is manslaughter, it'll 'elp you a bit if I swear as how you 'owled 'Eliza !' all the night. And I'll swear it, so 'elp me, if you'll only keep quiet."

"Manslaughter !" shrieked the prisoner. "Upon my——"

"Oh, stash it !" said the constable, as he slammed the trap-door. "He's artful," he soliloquized respectfully. "What's his lay ?"

The prisoner sank heavily on the bed. His flaccid cheeks heaved with a toad-like movement, in his bewildered fury. The power of thought was gone. He had no data on which it was possible to think. For hours he remained a bulbous mass, comatose from sheer futility.

At some period of the night he felt, rather than heard, that the trap-door opened.

"That's Jim."

The door shut.

For a time he experienced no other external sensation. Then he received what was evidently intended to be a strictly confidential visit, from the member of the C Division who conversed in Shibboleths.

"Got a mouthpiece ?"

"No, constable, I have not. In the first place, I am a non-smoker. And in the second place, when I was compelled to submit, as I

vaguely remember that I was compelled to submit, to the ignominy of being searched, like a port-manteau at a custom-house, I was deprived of all implements which might enable me to avoid the pleasure of your company, or add in any other way to my comfort."

This he said in a tone of intense irony which ought to have abashed the constable: but it was a complete failure.

C., etc., looked pityingly at him: "If you won't talk sense, have you got a solicitor?"

"No, I have not got a solicitor. And Heaven keep me from having a solicitor! I've got trouble enough as it is."

"Well, you've to be at Marlborough Street to-morrow. You'd better 'ave some one to say you've got a complete answer to the charge. The Beak don't think it respectful to be treated with contumacy by one of your class,—a well-known



murderer like you!" he said, with a certain air of reverence.

"If I was you I'd have a mouthpiece," he added. "It can't do no 'arm, not a good mouth-piece like Willy Camperdown. Better 'ave Willy. I should 'ave Willy. He defended Jigger Break-spear, 'onourable Borradaile, and Alfred Pardoe."

"Did they benefit by his assistance?"

"No," said the constable, thoughtfully. "They was all hit. But they was such bad cases! Mr. Camperdown makes a speciality of bad cases, as one might say."

The obvious inference of the kindly constable's view on Mr. Camperdown's practice was not reassuring.

"Well?"

"'Ave you any funds for your defence?" The constable (who received a commission on all clients introduced by him to Mr. Camperdown) was naturally compelled to ask the question. But he asked it delicately.

"I had funds—funds amounting to about £15. They were taken from me by brigands dressed in costumes similar to your own."

"The money will be returned, if it wasn't the proceeds of a robbery."

"As far as I know, it was not the proceeds of a robbery."

"Then you 'ave funds available for your defence," said the constable, clinching the matter.

"If I have funds, I may as well spend them on my defence as waste them in any other way," was the prisoner's hopeless reply.

"I should 'ave Mr. Camperdown."

"You said so before. Why, pray, should I have Mr. Camperdown?"

"Well, 'e's 'andy, and 'e's good. I dare say I could lay my 'and on him now at the Café Royal. It is only 11.35," said the constable, looking at his watch and preparing to lay his hand on Mr. Camperdown.

"All right ; send him round."

"I'll undertake to have him here first thing in the morning. You can 'ave every confidence in Willy. He acts for all the best blackmailers in the West End." With this pleasing testimonial the constable terminated the interview.

* * * * *

It was only 11.35! And yet it seemed to the prisoner that he had spent a whole hideous night in his cell.

CHAPTER XVI

HE DOES NOT TAKE IT

EARLY next morning Mr. William Camperdown, the only partner in Higgins, Camperdown & Co., of Vigo Street, W., was introduced to the prisoner Briscoe. The solicitor, who was a Welshman, wore reddish-brown hair and gimlet moustaches. Regardless of the warm spring weather, he had on a priceless old-dog fur coat, in the lapel of which was a large bunch of Parma violets : and he flourished an intensely shiny hat with a fat hand, swelling through a primrose-coloured glove.

"Pleased to meet you," he said, with his best bedside manner, as he adjusted his glasses.

"Eh ?"

"You will appear before Mr. Henderson," said Willy, getting to business at once. "The regular magistrate at Marlborough Street is ill, and Henderson is taking his duty. Now, then, as to facts. How are we off for facts ?"

"Facts?"

"What is our defence? What is our answer to this charge? Eh, what?" asked the solicitor, with his most confidential West End smile

"My position is this," said the prisoner; then he paused. "In fact, I may say that my position is a singularly awkward one."

"Of course, of course," said the eminent lawyer, with an indulgent smile, which seemed to mean, "This is your first murder."

"I may say that my position is far more awkward than you or any living man is likely to suppose."

"I see what you mean; you are sensitive, naturally. But I must ask you to give me an accurate description of the unfortunate circumstances which have placed you in a false position."

"Would it not be better to wait and see what the other side have to say first? We can make up our minds as to our line of defence afterwards."

"No, I think not. As your professional adviser, candour compels me to admit that I think not. What were you doing on the 18th?"

"I don't know."

"Come, come, sir. This is the 31st. You can't mean to say you don't know what you were doing on the 18th inst.?"

"No, I don't."

"Let me refresh your memory. The 18th was a Friday."

"Possibly."

"I must ask you not to be flippant. The 18th was unquestionably a Friday. Remember that I am your best friend." He paused. "The 18th was the day of the murder."

"I shall be very much obliged if you will tell



me all you know of the matter. Believe me, I am completely in the dark as to the whole—ahem—episode," the prisoner said, with absolute candour.

"Really, really, Mr. Briscoe!"

"Don't call me Briscoe."

The criminal lawyer was astounded.

"Are you going to suggest that you're not Briscoe?"

"I don't know at present. I'm going to find

out. I am not prepared to state whether I am or am not Briscoe. I have made mistakes before, by jumping at hasty conclusions. If I am proved to be Briscoe, I am Briscoe. And I must take on whatever responsibilities the being of Briscoe may entail. At present I keep an open mind. And I must ask you also to keep an open mind, at any rate in my presence."

Camperdown stared at him blankly.

"I don't quite understand."

"That's just it; neither do I. Owing to circumstances over which I had no control, I have completely lost all knowledge of my own identity."

"How long has this unfortunate condition existed?"

"Four days."

"Since the murder," said the lawyer, thoughtfully.

"I don't know anything about the murder."

"I should ante-date the condition if I were you. If you were feeling this way before the murder, it may help you. But I don't see how it will help us one iota if we prove that it was only after the occurrence—that you became—shall we say?—a little bit odd."

"No, we shall not say 'a little bit odd.' There is nothing odd about me. I am exceedingly unfortunate: that is all."

"And on occasions violent? I quite take your meaning. On occasions we are violent?"

The prisoner became violent and purple, and said things.

Willy winked horribly at him. "Keep all that for the Medico at Holloway."

"What do you mean? What the deuce do you mean?"

"It's wasted on me, Briscoe."

"I told you not to," said the prisoner, threateningly.

"Yes, but you've been identified as Briscoe. You may take it from me that you *are* Briscoe."

"I decline to take it from anybody. I insist on having the question of my identity threshed out in a court of law."

"Don't you worry. That's going to be done," said the lawyer, firmly. "Let us, first of all, see whether we can prove an alibi. Where have you been lately?"

"Yesterday I was——"

"No, no. Let us go back to the day of the murder."

"I can't go back to the day of the murder."

Willy shrugged his fur coat.

"Then you abandon the idea of an alibi?"

"I can't prove an alibi."

"Then let's do the thing thoroughly. Have

you ever imagined you were Charles I. or a teapot ? ” said Willy, looking critically at his client.

“ No—why ? ”

“ Well, then, try to.”

There was a pause.

Neither man seemed to understand the other. The lawyer spoke first.

“ Your story is this—— ”

“ That owing to an accident at Chalk Farm Station I lost my memory four days ago.”

“ What were you doing at Chalk Farm Station ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ Are you going to tell that to a jury ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Oh, well ! Heaven help you ! First you murder your wife. Then you lose your memory ! Really, really. No one will stand that, you know.”

“ Was it my wife ? ” asked the prisoner, timidly.

“ Of course it was. Whose wife did you think you’d murdered ? ”

“ That’s bad. That’s worse than I thought.”

“ Oh, I tell you it’s a bad case.”

The solicitor looked curiously at him for a few seconds.

“ You’re not mad,” he said at length.

“ Of course I’m not mad.”

“ Then what are you playing at ? ”

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The prisoner turned petulantly away, and ran his fingers through his hair. He did not attempt to give any answer to Mr. Camperdown's question.

The solicitor gazed intently at him, and compressed his ebony moustache.

"I should advise a good alibi, and see how we get on. If it breaks down, we can try the other thing. Fortunately you have got a very ordinary type of face. It would be easy to get people to swear that they saw you in Liverpool or at Broadstairs for a comparatively small sum. I know a little woman in Scarborough who could swear positively that she walked with you up and down the Spa on the night of the murder. You see, yours is a very popular type of face—nothing characteristic about you. So, one could work an alibi cheaply. But it would be a long way on the palmy side of fifteen pounds!"

The better nature of the prisoner rose in revolt. He looked the eminent lawyer up and down.

"The Devil!" he said. "The Devil!"

Then he lost his temper.

"I shall plead guilty whether—I am—or—not."

This was the end of the interview.

CHAPTER XVII

HE MEETS A GREAT WIT

THE party in the four-wheeler consisted of Clegg, a couple of specially selected members of the C Division, and the prisoner Briscoe. The eminent detective monopolized the conversation, which was entirely about Clegg. He was an ego-maniac without an ego. On those rare occasions when he found it impossible to talk about himself, his discomfort was positively painful to the spectator. During the short drive to Marlborough-street Police Court, he dealt chiefly with a trait of his own, which, he admitted, often surprised even him, namely, his absolute inability to



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make professional mistakes. Some people called it his luck, he said cynically. He knew better. He called it by its right name—instinct, with the necessary touch of *savoir-faire*, too often absent even in the most eminent English detectives.

The prisoner was astounded to see boys rushing about Regent Street with special morning editions of evening papers bearing the legend—

ARREST
OF
BRISCOE.
CAPTURE OF DE WET.
3rd Edition.

But it afforded him no spark of satisfaction to realize that his arrest was a matter of considerable public interest. Eminent though he apparently was in his own line, he was by no means pleased with the line which he had adopted. "Adopted" was perhaps not the right word. He felt himself a sort of compulsory universal legatee of a celebrated murderer ; at the same time, his position was also that of trusteeship for the murderer's individuality. Most ordinary murderers would have had a certain feeling of improper pride at the prominence given to their movements—or, rather, to the temporary suspension of their movements—over the capture of a rival in the same line of business, but the

prisoner, ambitious and egotistical though he was, felt absolutely unmoved. He had not the proper artistic temperament—his heart was not in his work.

But the triumph of the successful sportsman illumined the face of Clegg. He looked appreciatively at his "bag." The members of the C Division nudged one another to show how proud they were of Clegg, and how anxious they were that this great mind should properly appreciate their pride.

Elaborate precautions had been taken at the police-station in order to attract the public and to prevent them from obtaining a glimpse of the prisoner. He was successfully smuggled into a cell and detained there till the Magistrate had dealt with the night charges. By this time our hero had overcome his very natural feelings of annoyance at the mechanism of the law thus set in motion against himself. He was almost anxious to face the Magistrate, whom he regarded in the light of a specialist in identity, to be consulted on the question of whether or not he was Charles James Briscoe. He would give the Magistrate every assistance in his power, and no doubt the two, together, could come with little difficulty to a solution satisfactory to each party.

It was, therefore, with the air of an interested

spectator that he was shown into the dock, situated in a sort of disused swimming-bath. The court was packed to stuffiness with people ; and a buzzing noise prevailed as he entered. Opposite to him, on the bench, sat Mr. Henderson. He was a man with a face, apparently, made of dough, finished off with an indefinite beard. This peculiarity of appearance gave him a striking



resemblance to a well-known humorist, who has carried his sense of rollicking fun to the length of making his own dietary arrangements a source of amusement to a grateful public. Also, perhaps, it was the only reason that induced Mr. Henderson to

embark on the perilous seas of humour. For some years, the Magistrate had become what may aptly and horribly be described as "a bit of a wag in his way." He was not a universal wag, but only a wag in a way. That way tended, unhappily, in the direction of a revival of the obsolete pun-joke. It was his wont to play about injudiciously with the King's English, and especially with the names

of prisoners who came before him in his judicial capacity. Several sensitive criminals, with obvious names such as Drinkwater, Appleyard, and Bodkin, that were easily adapted to punning purposes, had been compelled to move out of Mr. Henderson's district.

Some of this pundit's humours have become classic—for instance, the Anglo-French joke about Marylebone and good Maries. His observation that a performance of *Faust* was a "Faust" rate performance was readily accepted by a weekly journal. Its name need not be specified. But the *Pall Mall Gazette* had hinted that Mr. Henderson ran considerable risk of being arrested for clowning in his own court. At the moment of the prisoner's entrance the Magistrate was automatically writing "Brisker," "Be brisk, go!" "Biscuit," and other humorous variations of the name of Briscoe, on his blotting-paper.

The reporters were scanning the dock to see whether the prisoner wore "a tightly buttoned frock-coat," "a fancy vest, and gent's gold Albert," or "carried a Trilby hat in his hand," and so brought himself within one of the recognized categories of criminal journalism. Then, as though mechanically, twenty or thirty pens wrote with a strange unanimity the words, "Callous indifference to his surroundings."

Callous indifference ! Why, the man was as interested in his surroundings as a new Adam who had leaped unexpectedly into a fully-peopled world.

At the bidding of Counsel for the Crown (a venomous person with the appearance of an intellectual ostler), Clegg stepped into the witness-box. Previously, the detective had been standing by the iron cage in which the prisoner was detained. He conducted himself like a lion-tamer, who was controlling a particularly savage beast solely by the power of his eye and the smartness of his clothes.

From information he had received, stated that lynx of the law, he had reason to suppose that the prisoner was loitering in Bond Street on the previous day. (This was a lie.) He had entered into conversation with "the man Briscoe."

The prisoner shuddered. However ornamental or historically famous one's name may be, the prefix of the word "man" is very galling to its owner. "The Man" is a sort of discourtesy title, which is a generic term for persons who are not yet liable to be called convicts.

For some time, continued the inspector, he had detained the prisoner in conversation in order to verify his suspicions as to his identity. But Briscoe, in spite of the detective's friendly

demeanour, had been curiously reticent about himself. When offered refreshment, he behaved in a suspicious manner, and did not readily accept the witness's offer.

However, he was induced to go to the St. James's restaurant. Here, even under the influence of "refreshment," he maintained a stolid and felonious silence. Amongst other things, he said that he had never been further from London than Chalk Farm Station. Briscoe, said the inspector, had been proved to be a Liverpool man. So, the mere fact that the prisoner pretended to be a Londoner showed that he was on his guard and was attempting to disguise the fact that he was Briscoe. Though witness had talked to him on many subjects, prisoner never admitted that he was a Liverpoolian ; on the contrary, he behaved in a markedly metropolitan manner. This conversational disguise did not, however, deceive the inspector, who recognized him from the accurate description circulated by the police. Further, he had in his possession a reproduction of a photograph of Briscoe. In order not to arouse the suspicions of prisoner, he invented an ingenious ruse, enabling him to retire and examine the *carte-de-visite*.

The fact that it did not resemble the prisoner to any notable degree proved that prisoner had

skilfully altered his appearance. Amongst other innovations, prisoner was wearing a high hat of unusual design, "such as might be worn by a violinist," in lieu of the Trilby in which he had been photographed.

The Magistrate tapped his hands with approval at the lucid and convincing evidence of the detective.

But the man in the dock listened with an air of ill-disguised disgust to the deductive reasoning of a person whom he still obstinately regarded as a strange man.

Mr. Clegg continued. He stated that, being absolutely convinced of Briscoe's identity, he mentioned the matter to him. Briscoe immediately became violent, but was eventually induced to walk to the police-station, where he was formally charged.

Thereupon he made a full confession.

"What?" roared the prisoner.

"You must not ask any questions yet," said the Magistrate, calmly.

The witness added, "In the presence of another inspector and myself he said, 'I can't deny anything. I admit it. I wish I had never done it. No one is to blame but me. I should never have confessed but for the fact that I feel sure that Inspector Clegg knows all.' These were

his very words," said the detective. "I made a note at the time."

With the air of a conjuror, who has produced a white rabbit out of nothing, Mr. Clegg unfolded the actual notes.

"Liar!" shouted the prisoner.

"You really mustn't comment on the evidence," said the Magistrate.

"Be silent."

"But this man is lying."

"Go on," said Mr. Henderson to the admirable witness.

"The prisoner further stated," the inspector continued, after consulting his notes, "that the deceased was a miser-

able woman, and that he had all along intended to surrender to Inspector Clegg. Prisoner made no further observation."

"Thank you, inspector," said the Magistrate, courteously, to the great detective. Then he turned to the prisoner, and asked firmly, "Any questions?"

"That fellow is a liar," was the answer of the

"LIAR!"



man in the cage, leaning forward over the railings. The statement came confidentially ; the Self-seeker spoke as man to man, rather than as a helpless prisoner to a licensed punster with unlimited power to pun and to punish.

"That is not a question ; it is a vituperative statement," was the judicial comment.

"I beg your pardon," the prisoner answered, pulling himself together, as though with a view to playing a game, the rules of which he did not in the least understand.

"Ask questions. You may ask any questions you like, but you must not make statements."

"I will do my best, sir. Believe me, I will do my best."

"No, no, no ! You must ask questions," said the Magistrate, who seemed to the prisoner to have an incomprehensible mania for interrogatories.

"You don't understand my position," was the pathetic reply.

"Any questions ?" insisted Mr. Henderson.

"Yes. I was looking at an automobile accident."

"You must not make a statement. You must ask the detective questions."

The prisoner turned to Clegg.

"What reason have you for supposing that I am Briscoe? Until you saw me, you naturally had no reason to suppose that I was Briscoe. Your mind was open on the subject. What makes you think I'm Briscoe? I merely ask for information."

"Well, you mustn't ask for information," said the Magistrate, kindly. "Though information is often laid here, a police-court is not the place to come to for information."

This legal joke was not generally appreciated. But some of the older constables, who knew the reputation of Mr. Henderson, indulged in a speculative titter. The Magistrate rewarded them with a nod of encouragement.

"You may, however, answer the question," he said to Clegg, with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

"From information I received——"

"Yes, that's just what I want to know," interrupted the prisoner. "I want to know what the information was."

"You mustn't ask the detective that," the Magistrate interrupted, with the air of a man concealing a Cabinet secret of which he is absolutely ignorant.

"Yes, sir, but it would be of considerable use to me. If the information, whatever it was, has

convinced the detective that I am Briscoe, surely," he added, with complete candour, "the divulgence of the information would help us to come to an accurate conclusion on the point."

"Would help whom?" asked the Magistrate.

"Why, you and me, of course!" the prisoner answered angrily.

"But why me? Why you?"

"We are both of us, by the nature of things, anxious to find out whether I am or am not Briscoe. You're paid to find out, aren't you?" he said, losing his temper at not receiving the assistance he had expected from the Magistrate, "and I'm anxious to find out—for purposes of my own."

Mr. Henderson, his face tense with astonishment, stared at the prisoner.

At length he asked, "Any other question?"

"Certainly not," answered the Self-seeker, with extreme disgust. "What's the good of asking questions?"

"You must not ask me questions, at all. You must ask them of the witness."

"I shall certainly bring an action for slander against the witness."

"You can't do it here. This is not a civil court. By that, I do not mean that it is a rude court, of course, but it is not a civil court," said

the Magistrate, delighted at the brilliance of his brain-product.

The prisoner buried his head in his hands, overcome more by the verbal acrobatics of Mr. Henderson than by the peril of his own position.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WIT AND THE WITNESS

THE Counsel for the Crown stated that he intended to call only one witness, and that he should then ask for a remand. Mr. Henderson intimated that he would be pleased to adopt any course suggested by any Counsel for the Crown.

The selected witness was Mr. Oliver James Tozer. His appearance suggested an intelligent and valuable dachshund, under the impression that it has got into the company of dog-stealers. He gave his evidence with extraordinary accuracy. His name, he swore, was Oliver James Tozer—"Tozer with a z, not with a s, if you please!"

Apparently, in his opinion the substitution of an ordinary s for the distinctive z would entirely vitiate the value of his evidence.

Experts in criminal law, who had standing-room in the back of the court, nudged one another. "Good witness!" they said.

In addition to spelling the name with a z, he

lived in Shepherd Market, Mayfair. Further, he stated that he was an Italian warehouseman.

"But you're surely not an Italian!" said Mr. Henderson, humorously. "Tozer isn't an Italian name."

"Nor is a French-polisher always a Frenchman," the witness answered. "I follow the profession of an Italian warehouseman. I am also an oil and colour man. But I am not a man made of oil and colour," he added, showing that he had no sense of humour.

"Then why didn't you say so at first," said the witty Magistrate, not unkindly. By this time the youngest constables had seen the joke—Mr. Henderson's, not Mr. Tozer's. Then the usher led the laughter. On the whole, it was a success. Mr. Henderson leaned back in his chair and proceeded to incubate further pleasantries.

But the prisoner was more interested in the witness Tozer than in the wit of Mr. Henderson, and he did not bother about smiling.



"Can't see a joke!" said the experts, ominously.

The witness continued his evidence. Three months ago the prisoner, who said he was a wealthy dog-biscuit manufacturer in Huddersfield, proposed marriage to Mr. Tozer's sister-in-law, Eliza. She having been unhappy with her first husband, Mr. Robert Tozer, a chocolate-box maker (the witness's elder brother), mainly owing to her own fault, witness and she "had words." This "led to unpleasantness." At that period she had, as far as he knew, decided to embark on no further nuptial adventures. But the prisoner was "that artful" that he had succeeded in breaking down the prudent but misanthropic resolution, too hastily formed by the relict of the chocolate-box manufacturer. The witness had heard of their marriage "in a round-about way," and though he had ceased to be on speaking terms with his sister-in-law, he begged leave to state that had he known that she was marrying her own murderer, he would have opposed the wedding "body and soul," so to speak. (When he had made his statement, Mr. Henderson declined his application for leave to make it, as it was not evidence.)

Witness (continuing) stated that three days before the murder his sister-in-law came to

Shepherd Market in a state of destitution, and make a certain statement (not evidence). Witness allowed her to stay at his house, though they were not on speaking terms, because prisoner had spent all her money (a fact which was also not evidence). The witness Tozer gave a great deal more evidence which was not really evidence at all, but which apparently told terribly against the prisoner.

On the afternoon of the 18th, witness saw prisoner for the first time. Briscoe called at the shop and had words. He insisted on seeing his wife, and they had more words. After that the prisoner and the deceased and the Italian warehouseman all had words together till teatime. After the words, things became "more friendly like," but the deceased declined to give the prisoner any more money—"which she hadn't got to give, though prisoner doubted the word of the dead woman most disrespectful."

Matters mended in the evening, and prisoner "sung a comic song, most sociable." If he remembered right, and he would not testify on oath unless he did remember right, the song was called "Haughty, Naughty Nelly of the Garway Road." Though it was comic, still he must say it in justice, "the song was most refined."

He had an appointment at nine o'clock at

the Running Footman, with a man who knew something for the Lincoln, and talked a good deal about liquid air. In both subjects the witness, as an intellectual man, took a deep interest.

Witness left deceased and prisoner "most pleasant, which he was pleased to see, though he knew no good would come of it."

When he returned at eleven o'clock the deceased was dead.

The rolling-pin was lying by her side, but the prisoner was gone.

"Any questions?" asked the Magistrate.

The prisoner, who had followed the evidence of Mr. Tozer with considerable interest and attention, proceeded, with the rash eagerness of an amateur, to cross-examine him.

"You only saw me once—if it was me?"

"Oh, it was you, right enough," was the bitter reply of the bereaved Italian warehouseman.

"And you say that, in addition to committing a murder, I sang a comic song?"

"Yes."

"Well, that settles it. I may not be in a position to prove that I did not commit the murder, but you cannot prove that I can sing a comic song. I am perfectly convinced that I could not sing a note. Do I look like a man who

could sing a comic song? Therefore, if the murder was committed by a vocalist, I am not the guilty man."

"Don't make speeches," said the Magistrate.

"I am not making speeches—I am helping the Court on a very material point, and I rely on you to assist rather than to thwart me in our quest for truth." He associated himself with the Magistrate with a pomposity that was quaintly pleasing to Mr. Henderson.

"Go on. Put your questions to Mr. Trouser."

"Tozer," corrected the witness; "Tozer with a z."

"I purpose, with your permission, sir, if the witness can provide me with the words of the song, 'Dainty, Saintly Nelly,' or whatever its grotesque title may be, to sing it to the best of my ability, so that your worship and myself may come to a just and unprejudiced conclusion. I guarantee to do my best. Then, sir," he added triumphantly, "you can judge whether or no I am a comic vocalist."

"A law court," said the Magistrate, "is not a music-hall."

"Oh," answered the prisoner, candidly, "I am absolutely ignorant of legal formalities. I merely suggested an easy test for arriving at the truth. If I have made a technical mistake, I apologize handsomely."

"Go on," said Mr. Henderson.

"Mr. Tozer, may I ask a personal question ?
Do you like me ?"

"Not after what you have done —no."

"Did you ever like me ?"

"I had words with you, but I was willing to let
by-gones be by-gones."

"The first time you met me I had words with
you. What were the words ?"

"They weren't what you might call words,"
said the witness, hesitating. "It was more like
domestic conversation, all parties being bitter.
Still, what you said was mostly adjectives, I will
say that."

The prisoner, addressing the Magistrate, said,
"Do I look like a man whose conversation would
be of that description ?"

"Your personal appearance may or may not be
in your favour, but you cannot interrogate me on
the subject."

"I am not interrogating you. I am working
with you. Don't you see that I am giving you
every assistance in my power ?" said the prisoner,
who realized the importance of ingratiating himself
with the Magistrate.

But the Magistrate gave him no encourage-
ment.

"Go on," he said.

"You say I came from Huddersfield, Mr. Tozer?"

"No, I said that you said you came from Huddersfield, where you said you were a well-to-do dog-biscuit manufacturer."

"Didn't it strike you as extraordinary that a well-to-do dog-biscuit manufacturer should marry the sister-in-law of an Italian warehouseman in a small way of business, and have words with him, and then sing an idiotic comic song after tea?"

"I haven't mixed much with dog-biscuit manufacturers. I suppose they're as affable as anybody else." Then he added bitterly, "I know the whole thing was a lie."

"So I did not really come from Huddersfield?" asked the prisoner, with a note of disappointment in his voice. He was losing a very valuable clue to his genesis.

"I don't know whether you came from 'Uddersfield or 'Ell, and I don't care," said the witness, angrily.

Mr. Henderson rebuked Mr. Tozer.

"I gave you an inch," he said wittily, "and, of course, you have taken an ell."

This observation was scarcely sense, but it was very well received by the police constables. Beyond all question Mr. Henderson was the most consistently witty Magistrate on the Bench.

The prisoner became peevish. "Really, Mr. Tozer, I must appeal to you as a brother-in-law."

"No, no, no!" interposed the Magistrate. "I don't see in what direction your cross-examination is tending."

"Sir, I wish to settle two questions. May I call them A and B?"

"A—Am I this man's brother-in-law? If I am not his brother-in-law I am not guilty of the murder.

"B—If I am his brother-in-law, have I murdered his sister—Eliza, I think was her name?"

"Go on," said the Magistrate, hopelessly.

"I must protest against this gentleman's behaviour. If I am his brother-in-law, it is clearly to his interest that I should not be the murderer of his sister-in-law. And if I am not his brother-in-law, I clearly must be innocent of the crime. I want him to answer my questions fairly. He has nothing to lose in either event, and I am in a singularly awkward position."

"Go on."

"I am doing my best, but I am getting no assistance from this complete stranger who claims to be my brother-in-law. Now listen, Mr. Tozer. You have only seen me once——"

"Twice."

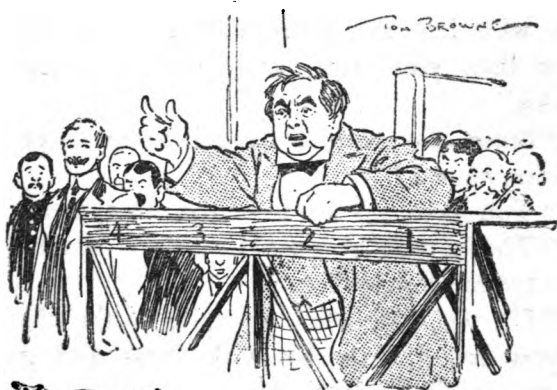
"When?"

"Last night in your cell."

"You recognized me as your brother-in-law?"

"Yes." (Sensation in Court.)

The prisoner was nonplussed. He felt convinced that he must, in a weak moment, have married into the Tozer family.



You recognise me.
 "Your brother-in-law?"

"Do you mean to say that you looked into all the cells at the police-station and picked me out from all the other prisoners?"

"No; it was like this," answered this singularly accurate witness. "Inspector Clegg sent for me, and when I got to the station he opened the booking-office door, and I looked into the cell.

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He said, 'This is Briscoe. Do you recognize your brother-in-law?' So of course I recognized you—though you are rather altered."

"Altered?"

"Well, I should think so—after what you've done!"

"What have I done to alter myself?"

"Murdered my sister-in-law. That alters a man who has the feelings of a man. You're fatter than you were, and flabbier about the cheeks."

"Since the 18th I have become fatter and flabbier, have I?"

"You have. You're not the same man."

"That's exactly what I say. I never have been the same man."

"Oh yes, you was. In spite of the changes in you brought on by wickedness and guilty shame, didn't I identify you?" The witness shrugged his shoulders with, perhaps, pardonable pride.

Then the prisoner turned to the Magistrate with complete candour.

"I am perfectly satisfied that I am not Briscoe. The methods employed by the police to identify prisoners are a scandal in a civilized country."

Applause at the back of the court.

"Any other question?"

"Yes. Are you going to discharge me?"

Mr. Henderson was astounded.

"Certainly not. The police have only tendered sufficient evidence to justify a remand: they have not produced sufficient evidence for me to discharge you."

The prisoner was bewildered at the magisterial maxim.

Suddenly an idea struck him.

He turned on the witness with a decisive question.

"Was I wearing whiskers on the day of the murder?"

"Not as I noticed."

"If I had been wearing large black whiskers coming to a point, would you have noticed them?"

"I shouldn't have made a remark to your face. Of course I should have been surprised in a brother-in-law. No, I shouldn't have noticed them, not to your face, I must say."

"But you would have noticed them *on* my face?"

"Certainly I should."

The prisoner looked round the court with an air of triumph which was absolutely incomprehensible to the spectators. He had proved to his own complete satisfaction that he was not Mr.

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Tozer's brother-in-law, that he was not a comic vocalist, and that he had not committed the only murder of which he was accused.

"Any other question?"

"No, sir."

"Remanded for a week."

"I suppose it will be possible for me to call a witness to prove that I am not this offensive person's connection by marriage?"

"Who do you want to call?"

"Sir Theodore Parker."

"What?"

"Only Sir Theodore Parker. That will be enough."

"I should think it would. Remove the prisoner."

CHAPTER XIX

THE STRATEGY OF THE STRANGE MAN

THE prisoner was elbowed out of court by a couple of tittering constables, who seemed rather pleased with their charge. On the way to the cells they congratulated him on "keeping up his end."

"That is a good idea of yours, governor, to call Sir Theodore Parker to prove that you used to wear black whiskers in your youth. More likely he will prosecute you at the Old Bailey."

"Will he?" the prisoner inquired ironically. "I don't think he will."

"Quite likely. If he gets unpleasant, just you ask him to step into the witness-box and have a little friendly chat about whiskers."

"That's about your form," said the other constable, admiringly. "You'll get on well with Sir Theodore, if you don't cross-examine him too severely. Suppose his evidence don't quite come up to your expectations, just ask the judge to go

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into the box and swear that you were pals at Eton. You've got cheek enough for it."

This was all meant as friendly chaff. But the prisoner didn't quite like it. However, he was learning to control his temper.

To the more intelligent-looking of the two constables he said, "Look here, my good man, will you just run down to the Temple and tell Sir Theodore Parker that the gentleman who had an interview with him on Tuesday morning, on a personal matter—yes, say a personal matter—is anxious to have a few minutes' conversation at any moment convenient to him."

"Funny man!" said the constable, sadly, as he shut him up in a cell. "You'll make Henderson jealous."

The prisoner was happier than he had been for some time.

He felt that he had escaped a dire peril, for he was firmly convinced that he was not Briscoe, and that he would be able to prove the fact conclusively. The removal of his whiskers, an operation effected at the request of Sir Theodore, had undoubtedly led to his arrest under a misapprehension. The K.C. would, therefore, when the matter was explained to him, be only too pleased to state that on the occasion of the visit to Essex Court he was wearing a crop of whiskers

which could not have been produced subsequent to the murder.

Sir Theodore, indeed, owed him a debt of gratitude, a debt that he would now be courteously asked to repay.

The difficulty seemed to lie in conveying the courteous request to Sir Theodore.

After "lunch" a Black Maria called and conveyed such prisoners as were under remand to Holloway Castle. The man, who was not Briscoe, was amongst the number, and he was taken to the north of London in a conveyance, which is alleged by habitual passengers to compare unfavourably with the third-class carriages on the South-Eastern Railway system, but which is, of course, more comfortable than an ordinary omnibus.

At Holloway the prisoner was received with the courtesy which is due to an eminent criminal. For, commonplace as was the tragedy of Shepherd Market—"the Mayfair Murder," the matter had been christened by the Press—it had somehow caught hold of the public taste. Also, the affair had occurred at a moment when there was a dearth of interest in the newspapers. The perpetrator of the crime had timed the tragedy to a moment. He had given his work to the world at exactly the right period. Had he been the

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agent of a syndicate of evening newspapers, he could not have gauged the wants of the reading public more accurately. Indeed, it is possible that an enterprising journal may some day subsidize an unemployed war-correspondent to commit a murder—possibly that of another war-correspondent on the staff of the same journal, in the interest of the said journal. And of general peace and quiet.

“The Mayfair Murder” had been put on the market with as much skill as is necessary for the promotion of a motor-car company or the publication of a religious novel.

There are moments when murders, and motors, and morals are a drug in the market. At other times, the public pants eagerly after one or other of these exciting topics.

So, when the prison van had entered the stately court of Holloway, and the Self-seeker stepped from it, his pompous demeanour was not out of place in the most talked-about man in England. The fact that Briscoe had introduced a novelty in wife-murder—a rolling-pin—paled before the originality of Briscoe’s behaviour in the dock.

The Governor received him with dignity, but with hospitality.

The afternoon sun shone hotly down into the

court, and made the Black Maria seem blacker than it was. Suddenly, there came from it the beautiful voice of a woman. Soft and tender were the words—

“Manon, voici le soleil,
C'est le printemps, c'est l'eveil !”

And the voice was soft and tender too.

The blue official figures in the courtyard stood still ; the expression of their faces softened a little at the sound. They watched the unloading of the cargo of crime as it came from the prison van, to find the singer of Spring who sang so sweetly in the cage of shame.

Sullen men slouched forth ; pallid and care-worn clerk-like persons stepped hastily from the van.

The last who came out was the little French girl, who sang so sweetly. She was draggled and flashy, her face a dab of dirty white with crimson patches, and beady eyes.

She had practised piracy on the King's highway. And she was not more than seventeen years old.

The faces of the men grew hard.

From the Self-seeker all immediate interest in himself had gone. A strange feeling of sorrow

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came to his heart. And somehow that feeling of sorrow warmed it.

He was taken away unheeding, to his cell.

There he burst into tears.



For a long time he wept bitterly, with great sobs, that came from his heart. At first, his anguish was rather a physical than an emotional condition. But when his chest heaved less convulsively, and the tears had ceased, a different view of life seemed to dawn upon the prisoner. The song of the woman who sang in the prison

yard had struck a strange note in his heart. His soul was touched and quickened. Now, for the first time, he knew that somewhere within him there was such a thing as a heart, that he was capable of sorrow for another's pain, and that he could feel sympathy for others' sadness. At the sound of that woman's voice he awakened to a passionate longing for love. Hitherto, he

had been wandering alone, seeking himself. Now he knew that this quest, in itself, was vain. Vaguely and hazily though the awakening came, he felt that there was a woman somewhere in the world whose tenderness he craved, and whose love for him formed the major portion of whatever existence it was his to lead.

“Briscoe.”

Two warders escorted him into an unfurnished room. There he was placed amongst three conspicuous burglars, a couple of unsuccessful tramps, and an habitual dog-stealer. Even in Constantinople no intelligent cur of miscellaneous origin, a dog-show in itself, could have regarded this man with feelings other than of grave distrust.

From a door at the end of the room Clegg entered with a stout, middle-aged female.

The Inspector winked conspicuously at the Self-seeker.

“Which of these is the gentleman that you saw going into Mr. Tozer’s shop?” he asked of the lady.

Immediately, she focussed her eyes on the prisoner, who had been carefully put in the centre of the unkempt ruffians, “for purposes of facilitating identification.”

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"He's more like him than the others," she said at last.

Clegg snapped, "It isn't any one of the others? You are sure of that?"

"Oh no, Mr. Clegg!"



"And some one *did* go into the shop? Didn't he, mother?"

"Yes, Mr. Clegg!"

"Then it couldn't have been any one else!"

"Oh, I can't say but what——"

"Don't prevaricate. You have said it wasn't

any one of the others," answered the Inspector, sharply.

"Then, I suppose, Mr. Clegg, it must be the gentleman. There are no other gentlemen here as I can see."

The worthy woman was doing her best. She thought she was playing a sort of round game, "Hunt the prisoner." The impression craftily conveyed to her mind by the Inspector was that if she couldn't identify the actual man she should pitch upon the person who was most like him.

"Then you identify him! Remember, you picked him out of a good many other gentlemen without any hesitation."

"Yes, Mr. Clegg."

Then the lady withdrew.

Following this orthodox procedure, Mr. Clegg arranged that the prisoner should be identified by three additional witnesses.

But the prisoner had lost interest.

He made no objection to the egregious farces that were being played before him. He callously regarded the consummate skill with which Clegg was trying to weave a halter round his neck.

He was home-sick.

And the worst of it was that he did not know for certain that he had a home at all.

CHAPTER XX

THE POWER OF LOVE

ON returning to his cell, he asked a warder for notepaper, in order that he might communicate with Sir Theodore Parker.

The paper with which he was supplied was horribly official, both in character and colour. It stated that the correspondent was an inmate of His Majesty's prison, and contained unintelligible algebraical data.

But the prisoner received it gladly. His actual detention was now a matter of secondary importance, as far as he himself was concerned. But he realized that some one who was near and dear to him, or who had been in the habit of being near and dear to him, was probably yearning for his presence. He was becoming unselfish even in his search for self. The fact that he was working as much for another as for himself produced the effect of calm determination, of placid confidence in the ultimate result.

Such is the power of love—even if one have not the vaguest idea of whom it is that one is in love with.

Under the influence of an unknown love he produced the following letter. In a sense it was a love-letter directed to a third party with the purpose of setting himself free to pursue his quest of the woman he loved :—

“SIR,—In compliance with your request, I have followed your suggestion with regard to my hirsute appendages. In so doing you will easily understand that I was making a very serious sacrifice. You must recognize that no man would effect so great an alteration in his appearance save under stress of overpowering circumstances. That I had caused you considerable inconvenience, all unwittingly, I am perfectly prepared to admit as a gentleman. To meet your views on the matter, and to obviate the possibility of further inconvenience to yourself, I had my whiskers removed.

“I ask for no thanks. I did what I deemed right.

“Unhappily, since the removal of my whiskers I have been arrested for murder——”

Here he was at a loss. His powers of composition degenerated.

“The murderer that I am supposed to be was

a clean-shaven person. If you will be so good as to say that I wore whiskers such as yours after the murder, which seems to have happened on the 18th ultimo, it will be perfectly clear that I am not the murderer.

“Thanking you in anticipation,

“Yours faithfully,”

What?

“Yours faithfully——” Who?

That was awkward.

Certainly he should not sign himself “Briscoe.”

He was a compulsory anonymous letter-writer.

After deep thought he got out of the difficulty by adding a postscript :—

“P.S.—The murderer that I am supposed to be is C. J. Briscoe, with whom you will kindly communicate.”

Then he read the letter over for the third time. It gave him not the slightest satisfaction. The thing seemed bald and jerky in construction. However, there could be no question but that it would be intelligible to Sir Theodore.

So he rang the bell.

A bulbous-faced warder, with a Yorkshire accent, came in. He handed over to the prisoner the sum of £15 7s., which had been found on his person at Vine Street, and to which it appeared to

the authorities that he had a *prima-facie* claim. The rubicund warder showed a tendency to talk about things in general, and prison-diet in particular, in a pleasant, hearty way.

The prisoner was not conversationally inclined, but he arranged to take and pay for all the extras in the way of food and physical assistance which the regulations of Holloway permitted.



He ordered a dinner consisting of hot roast chicken and a half-pint of claret and Gorgonzola cheese. The Yorkshireman threw cold water on a suggestion of Benedictine, but accepted one shilling for his services, and took the letter away with him.

In due course the hot roast chicken arrived

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cold, and the claret arrived tepid. The Gorgonzola cheese was in a highly atmospheric condition.

Eventually the prisoner retired to rest, and slept the sleep of the ordinary man, who suffers only from the ordinary anxieties of life.

(He had a potent soporific in an unknown and unrequited love.)

CHAPTER XXI

HE MEETS AN OLD SCHOOLFELLOW

THE next morning brought with it bad news. After the cell had been cleaned by an impecunious prisoner subsidized for the purpose, the hearty Yorkshireman appeared, with the letter prepared overnight for Sir Theodore Parker's perusal.

The warder explained that the governor, who exercised censorship over the literary efforts of the temporary inhabitants of His Majesty's prison, declined to allow this letter to be forwarded.

"Why not? Really, you astound me! The governor has no conception of what he is doing."

The Yorkshireman stated that the governor was the governor.

"But he is interfering with the liberty of the subject. Or, rather, he is unwarrantably standing in the way of the subject gaining his liberty. I will not have it. I protest. I protest against the action of the governor," said the prisoner, with extreme firmness.

The Yorkshireman good-humouredly repeated his definition of the governor.

"On what grounds does he object to forward my communication to the proper quarter?"

"On what grounds?"

"Yes, what did he say?"

"He said it was damned rot!"

"What?" The upper lip of the prisoner became tense with indignation.

"Rot!" repeated the warder, firmly, but heartily.

"My letter is nothing of the sort. I wrote it as man to man, as one gentleman who has done another gentleman a service, asking that gentleman to acknowledge the service by doing him a slight favour in return."

The warder repeated the governor's definition of the correspondence in question.

"It's dharmed Rhort. Ahund you know't."

Then the Yorkshireman smiled pleasantly and prepared to leave the cell.

The prisoner had received a great shock.

Though he had a perfect answer to the charge against him, he felt that, cooped up in the gaol, it might be impossible to prove his innocence. Hampered by these incomprehensible restrictions, all his efforts might be futile. A cold perspiration came over him. But he pulled himself together

by sheer will-power into a condition of exaggerated calm.

"I shall have bail," he said, as though he were at a restaurant, and had from a list of suggested liqueurs selected Benedictine.

"Not for murder, Mister."

"Impossible? Is it impossible, my good man?"

"Aye."

"What can I do? I ask you as a friend, how can I escape from this awkward position unless I am at large?"

The Yorkshireman made no definite answer.

"Maybe these'll help you. Maybe aye and maybe no," he said, with a humorous North-country twinkle in his eye; and he handed the prisoner a packet of letters, which he had almost forgotten to deliver.

Then the Yorkshireman left the cell.

The prisoner examined his correspondence.

It formed a strange budget.

There were one or two abusive anonymous letters. There were eight tracts—with the most unpleasant passages marked in red chalk, violet ink, or pencil.

"Willie's Death-Warrant" is not pleasant reading for a person who is more than suspected of wife-murder. A man must be in rather high

spirits—such as are engendered on the occasion of his first honeymoon, spent at Naples, with the street-singers wooing his not too musical ear with the strains of “Funiculi, funicula,” or “Santa Lucia,” for him, really, to enjoy the perusal of “The Horrors of Hell ; with Appendix of Sins,” by G. B. Pycroft, B.A., of St. David’s, Lampeter.

One letter pointed out the suitability of the Baptist Creed for a person whose life was not likely to be of long duration. A Christian Scientific lady enclosed a peculiar pamphlet demonstrating the pleasing, if incredible, fact that pain is merely a mental delusion.

Hanging, therefore, however fatal, was a purely imaginary condition of the mind.

One of our leading modellers in wax offered a considerable price for any articles of clothing which the prisoner had actually worn on the occasion of the murder, and might be prepared to hand over to the artist. It was proposed to construct a life-like portrait-model in wax (best) representing Mr. Briscoe manipulating a rolling-pin.

The editor of a magazine was anxious to secure photographs of the prisoner taken at different periods of his career. For one of the great features of the “Hyde Park” was the reproduction of incredible portraits of more or less unknown celebrities. The particular celebrity was shown

at the age of one—looking exactly like all other celebrities at the same period of life.

At the age of eighteen he appeared wearing a large square-cut beard, like an Assyrian Monarch, and looking about fifty-six. When thirty-five the celebrity always wore a large moustache and an ill-fitting frock coat, and held in his hand a bowler hat with a flat brim and no crown. Further, he wore a tie like a bullet-proof cuirass, and had the general appearance of an anæmic suburban conjuror who could not be less than forty-three years of age.

The “present time” portrait showed a handsome, clean-shaven, legal-looking person of about twenty-five, with clear-cut features, who bore no sort of resemblance to the previous pictures.

With none of the wishes of his correspondents was the prisoner, so far, prepared to comply.

He examined further letters.

Three contained propositions of marriage, and two suggested schemes of “walking out” (on approval). One young lady, who was employed in a large drapery establishment in Bayswater, wrote very prettily. She felt sure that Mr. Briscoe had been unhappy in his married life, “or he wouldn’t have done what he was accused of doing, not that she believed it.” She was convinced that she could make him happy if only the jury should

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acquit him. She was, according to her own statement, "Fairish, with large speaking eyes, and, if one can believe what people say, pretty." Her nature, she herself knew, was loving, "if only she met the right person."

And the indices pointed to Briscoe !

It seemed to him, viewing the matter fairly as he did, an astounding thing that a woman, who knew even less of him than he himself did, should wish to be his wife simply because he was accused of murder—and wife-murder at that !

He was ignorant of the fact that every woman who is accused of murder is inundated with proposals of marriage from amorous swains who are complete strangers to herself, and who on all points save matrimony with murderesses are conspicuously sane.

There is an upholsterer in the Edgeware Road, who has proposed marriage to all the murderesses who have been executed within the last seventeen years.

He is quite a good upholsterer, and he never mentions his unsuccessful love affairs except to the objects of his affections.

Hitherto, circumstances over which these ladies have had absolutely no control have condemned that upholsterer to celibacy. But he still scans the police reports, anxiously looking for his bride.

In disgust the prisoner pitched his letters on the floor.

It annoyed him intensely to think that people wanted to marry him simply because he was accused of murder. His notoriety had given him a fictitious nuptial value. And to very inferior intellects notoriety is Fame. The wish of the draper's assistant to be his bride because he was supposed to be a murderer is, in the main, identical with the craving of the scion of nobility to marry a notorious woman simply because she is supposed to be an actress.

Every man desires to be loved for himself, or, still better, for what he believes himself to be.

It is a galling thing, therefore, to receive offers of marriage simply because one is suspected of a murder—and a murder that one has not even committed.

The Self-seeker was distinctly galled. He, certainly, would have no correspondence with



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religious touts or artistic portrait-modellers in wax, or shop-assistants who wanted to marry Briscoe. It gave him some satisfaction to tear up all their letters into small pieces.

Suddenly, another warder came into the cell.

"Would you care to see Mr. Varner?"

"Mr. Who?"

"Mr. Varner, the solicitor."

"I don't know him."

"He says he was at school with you."

The prisoner was delighted. A meeting with an old schoolfellow would solve the question of his identity.

"Certainly, I shall be pleased to see him."

The warder arranged the necessary formalities attending the meeting of the prisoner and his friend.

Mr. Varner was a shrewd-looking man of thirty-five. There were enterprise and energy in the flapping of his coat. His manner was masterful—almost eminent.

"You don't recognize me! I'm Horace Varner;" in a low voice he added, "Recognize me at once."

Under the influence of this peremptory personality, the prisoner blurted out:—

"Ah, I didn't know you at first. You've

changed so astonishingly little since I saw you last that I really couldn't recognize you."

Horace Varner turned to the warder. "I am



going to defend the prisoner," he said. "It is not necessary for you to be present at our interview."

The warder retired.

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"Now, sir, the time is short. I am a busy man. My proposition to you is this. I am personally quite convinced of your innocence. And, absolutely regardless of expense, I intend to extricate you from your present position. I purpose retaining the most eminent counsel at the Bar for your defence. Are you agreeable?"

The delicacy of the solicitor in not alluding to the past, but in plunging immediately into the present, unmanned the prisoner.

"You overwhelm me! You will do all this for an old schoolfellow?" he asked, with a tremor of real gratitude.

"I will do all that money and skill can do, if you will place yourself entirely in my hands."

The clear blue eyes and the pushful, energetic chin of the solicitor inspired confidence in the prisoner.

"Certainly, I will, for the sake of—"

"Oh, we needn't go into that. We haven't time. You authorize me to act for you. That is understood. You must, of course, see no other solicitor—on any pretence whatever."

"There is something in old schoolboy friendship after all," said the prisoner, with tears of gratitude trembling to his eyes.

"We haven't time to go into that. Here is my card :—

'Varner and Varner, Sons, and Varners,
9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, Southampton Buildings,
Chancery Lane.'

If you want to communicate with me, that is my address. But, remember, I am a very busy man. I am off now to retain counsel."

"Stop, my dear sir."

The solicitor was gone.

The prisoner was paralyzed by Varner's energy quite as much as by his tactful devotion to an old schoolfellow. Without saying one inconsiderate word as to the unfortunate position of the prisoner, this chivalrous old schoolfellow had placed his purse and his valuable time at his service—for the sake of old lang syne.

A thousand questions came to the tip of the prisoner's tongue directly the solicitor had vanished. At what school was it that this beautiful friendship had originated? Varner was apparently quite ten years the junior of the prisoner. Had Varner been prisoner's fag? Why was he so fond of prisoner? What was prisoner's name? Varner must at least know the name of his old friend.

Here prisoner's speculations ran into a blind alley.

Varner had come to see Briscoe !

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Therefore, Varner was Briscoe's friend, and not prisoner's.

And yet Varner had clearly identified prisoner as Briscoe.

That being so, why undeceive Varner? If Varner was prepared to strain every nerve on behalf of Briscoe, why put obstacles in Varner's way—especially if Varner was a good man.

True, strictly speaking, prisoner would be obtaining the services of Varner under false pretences.

But, then, he had been arrested as Briscoe under a mistake.

On the whole, it would be hypocritical to object to be defended as Briscoe under a mistake—especially if Varner was a good man.

Varner's card guaranteed his ability. He was not Varner alone. He was all sorts and conditions of Varners. The name cropped up like a recurring decimal. And the address was reassuringly comprehensive.

The prisoner fell.

He decided not to undeceive Varner.

CHAPTER XXII.

VARNER AND VARNER, SONS, AND VARNERS.

THE next three days dragged dolefully for the prisoner.

Sunday in Holloway Castle is perhaps more dismally Sundayfied than in any other part of London. On Sunday Holloway Castle is as absolutely Scotch as are the Hebrides.

The prisoner passed his days in reading those papers which contained accounts of his performances at Marlborough Street Police Court. He examined with care the portraits of himself contained in these journals. They gave him the appearance of those individuals who have been cured of internal troubles by taking the emulsions so extensively advertised in the daily Press.

No two portraits resembled one another in any remarkable degree.

No single portrait resembled the prisoner in any degree at all.

In fact, there were as many views of his

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appearance as there are theories as to the authorship of the Books of Moses.



The prisoner.
took exercise.

Also, the prisoner took exercise and read his abusive anonymous letters and his proposals of

marriage as they came in. Besides these recreations, he thought a great deal about Varner. As some sort of sop to his conscience for the trick that he was playing upon the solicitor in pretending that he was Briscoe, he sent him a graceful letter, enclosing two five-pound notes as his (prisoner's) contribution to his (Briscoe's) defence. He expressed a hope that Varner was leaving no stone unturned to establish the joint innocence of Briscoe and prisoner.

He was naturally entirely ignorant of Varner's real view of the matter, which was somewhat curious.

Horace Varner was the second son of the late Theobald Varner, senior partner of the celebrated firm of Varner and Co. The Varners were not only a legal but a litigious family. No Varner had ever been able to get on with any other Varner for any appreciable length of time. As soon as a Varner *père* took a Varner *fils* into partnership trouble occurred, affidavits were filed, and injunctions sought. The result was that there existed in London no less than five firms of Varners, all blood-relations, and no single one was on speaking terms with another. Varner and Co. practised in St. James's Street. Varner Brothers were located in Lincoln's Inn. G. B. Varner, a notary public, did a moderate business

in Doctors' Commons, whilst Varner, Varner, and Varner had a huge commercial connection in Old Broad Street. So, when Horace quarrelled with his elder brother, George, he immediately formed a variation of the Varner theme, and started, with a capital of £35,000 left to him by his father, the business of Varner and Varner, Sons, and Varners, in Chancery Lane.

In order to advertise himself, it struck him that it would be a brilliant idea to undertake the defence of Briscoe.

Of the facts of the Mayfair murder he knew only what had appeared in the papers. But he foresaw that the extraordinary line of defence—if defence it could be called—on which the prisoner had embarked would tend to rivet public attention on the case.

He, in his own mind, had no doubt about the prisoner's guilt. But he intended, in the event of securing him as a client, to retain the most eminent men at the Bar for his defence when the case came on at the Old Bailey.

But before that, he would himself appear at the Police Court. He would insult the egregious Mr. Henderson. And, in so doing, he would have the entire sympathy and support of the Press. He would boom himself as the coming criminal-lawyer.

After the sentence, he would get up a monster petition in favour of the prisoner. He would hire the St. James's Hall, and call a public meeting (collected by a private agency of his own) to attack the Home Secretary. He would address the public meeting himself, and reply suitably to any vote of thanks which he might see fit to have moved to himself. It would be very expensive, of course : but the fact that the money came out of his own pocket would never be suspected by the public. The money would officially come from a "Briscoe Defence Fund," to which the wives and mothers of England would be stated to have contributed, as a mark of sympathy for the alleged wife-murderer.

It was with this view that he had introduced himself to the authorities at Holloway as an old schoolfellow of the prisoner Briscoe.

Briscoe would be merely the means of advertising Varner's own branch of the great legal family of Varner. The solicitor was too busily engaged in arranging his plans for publicity to visit his client in Holloway.

The prisoner wrote several notes requesting an interview with his solicitor. The wires received in reply, "Impossible, all going well," "Sorry, imprac.," were scarcely satisfactory.

The day for his reappearance at Marlborough

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Street was getting very near. He had not yet succeeded in communicating with Sir Theodore Parker, and apparently he was quite out of touch with his solicitor. Everything tended to make him nervous and irritable.

On the morning of the day before he was due at the Police Court he wired to Varners, "Insist on seeing you, or change my solicitor, *per pro* Briscoe."

He rather flattered himself that he had got out of the signature-difficulty with considerable neatness.

The telegram was a success. It secured the attendance of Varner.

He did not attend in a very good temper. His coat tails whisked busily. The prisoner did not think he was quite a gentleman, but he was every inch a Man of the World.

"Now, sir, what have you to say?" Varner asked brusquely.

"I have got any amount of things to say."

But he was anxious to avoid talking much about old schoolboy days, lest he should stumble into revealing the fact that he was not Briscoe. In that event, of course, Varner would not continue his costly and Quixotic defence of a person who was really a complete stranger.

"Well, let us have the most important."

"You know, Varner, old fellow, you do not seem to be as stout as you were." This, he thought, was a good opening. It alluded in a diplomatic way to the dear old schoolboy days at——?

"We needn't go into that. I've been running all over London and sitting up all night over your case. That does not tend to adiposity. Really,



I have quite enough to do with your affairs without being dragged up here to listen to your comments on my personal appearance."

As a matter of fact, Varner was anxious to compel the prisoner to conduct his own defence on the next day. He hoped for a repetition of his peculiar cross-examination on the last occasion to still further increase the interest in the "May-fair murder." Then, on the next remand, when everything was ripe, and people were speculating

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as to who would defend the prisoner, Varner would suddenly appear to conduct the defence. That would be another sensation in the case, the first of many which the energetic young lawyer was incubating.

As "Varner, old fellow" seemed undesirous, doubtless from feelings of delicacy, to speak of happier days, the prisoner asked—

"Well, what have you been doing all this time?"

"In brief, everything that mortal man can do."

This was gratifying, though not explicit.

"Yes, but what? How have you been doing it?"

"My dear sir, if you employ a bootmaker to construct you a pair of boots, you do not ask him how he is constructing them. You have employed me—if employ be the right term—to conduct your defence. I only ask the consideration which is paid to a bootmaker—may I add, an almost gratuitous bootmaker? When your defence is ready you may criticize it. Till then your inquiries will only interfere with it."

"You don't seem to realize that it is a much more serious thing to be accused of murder than to be expecting the arrival of a pair of boots."

"These discussions are futile, and they are wasting my time—the time which I devote to

you. Your arguments are all very well before a Magistrate. And I want to impress this on you. Your cross-examination on the last occasion was admirable. Repeat it to-morrow. Give your suit full play. Suggest calling any witness you like—the King of the Belgians or Mr. Tim Healy, or any one who may occur to you on the spur of the moment. It is a splendid advertisement,” slipped from him.

Astounded, the prisoner asked, “But aren’t *you* going to appear for me to-morrow?”

“No, and I’ll tell you why. Your system of cross-examination at random may produce the most startling results. As a prisoner without means to employ legal assistance, you obtain the sympathy and indulgence of the Magistrate.”

“Oh, do I?”

“Yes. That comic-song suggestion of yours was a good idea. Develop it, when occasion arises. For instance. If it is stated that you have ever tobogganned, offer to toboggan then and there, to prove that you can’t toboggan. Any fanciful scheme of that sort makes you popular with the public. You are already very popular with the public. You have made London laugh. If you get off, if—you will be worth a hundred a week to any music-hall.”

“I decline to conduct myself and my defence

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with a view to following a distasteful though remunerative career. You astound me by your suggestion."

"I knew it would be so. I have astounded you. Not only do you waste my time, but I astound you. Good day."

The prisoner trembled with anxiety and anger.

"If you leave me now, sir, I warn you I shall dismiss you as my solicitor. So take warning. Leave this room, sir, and you never cross my threshold again. I will inform the—ahem—staff not to admit you."

Varner found it impossible to terminate the interview.

He turned calmly to the panting prisoner.

"What I want to impress on you is this. Your very, very skilful behaviour in Court disarms the prosecution. They do not know what you're driving at. You, of course, know exactly, what you're driving at, and you may thus elicit very valuable information, which, by the strict laws of evidence, a legal representative would be powerless to obtain.

"Next week, when I conduct your case in person, I shall avail myself of the information which you will have so skilfully obtained."

"Yes," said the prisoner, uneasily, "but you

haven't asked me anything about myself, or gone thoroughly into the case with me."

"No. These cases are all cut and dried. I have them at my finger ends. You would tell me the truth or something else that you preferred. My business is to secure your acquittal. I am now busy with the facts of the case."

"Yes, but what have you done?"

"I have interviewed all the witnesses, but not in my capacity of solicitor for you. I have seen them in various other capacities. Therefore I must be kept in the dark until to-morrow week. Do you understand?"

"In a way, yes."

"Well, that's right. Keep up heart, and all will be well."

Varner's inquiries had convinced him that the case was one of mistaken identity. He knew that Clegg and Company were straining every nerve to establish the prisoner's guilt. But he would not burst their bubble till the case had got to the Old Bailey. Then he would burst it with a bang.

"I firmly believe that all will be well. I'm very grateful to you for all you've been doing, but I want to know what it is," said the prisoner.

"Amongst other things, I have retained three Counsel. To begin at the bottom, I have secured as a third string the Hon. Otho Johnstone.

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Strictly speaking, he is not a lawyer at all. But he writes a good deal for the papers. He will advertise us."

"I must say that I think that quite sufficient publicity has already been given to the matter. Remember, you are conducting a murder case, not a menagerie."

Varner looked pained and grieved.

"I am sorry that you under-estimate the power of the Press. Nowadays people are not tried by a judge and jury: they are tried by a detective and the halfpenny papers."

"Oh, indeed! You know best."

"My second counsel is Mr. Brall, who can be relied upon to keep the judge in his place should he show any wish to take a prominent and prejudiced part in the proceedings. And as leader," said the solicitor, with a self-satisfied smile, "I have secured the services of Sir Theodore Parker."

"Sir Theodore Parker!" shrieked the prisoner.

"Yes. He has undertaken to give every attention to the case. I had to pay him a hundred guineas as a retainer, which he only accepted as a personal favour to myself."

"You don't happen to know," said the prisoner, with bitter irony, "that Sir Theodore

Parker is the principal witness for the defence."

"I am aware that you made some grotesque observation of the sort at Marlborough Street. And it was only on my assurance that you would treat him at any rate with respect and make no allusion to whiskers, that he consented to accept my cheque."

"But his whiskers are part of my case."

"Nonsense."

"They are the backbone of my case. But for Sir Theodore's whiskers I might as well plead guilty."

"Personally, the joke does not appeal to me. I know it's popular ; whiskers happen to be in the air just now. 'Where's your whiskers ?' is the legitimate descendant of 'How's your poor feet ?' 'Where did you get that hat ?' and 'There's hair,' as a catch-word. But to me it's an unintelligible mystery. However, one cannot argue about humour or religion or patent medicines. What appeals to one man does not appeal to another. That is all one can say ; but I give you this word of warning," he said impressively to the prisoner, who gazed at him with stolid surprise, "Never mention the subject of whiskers again if you wish to retain the services of Sir Theodore. He has been so annoyed by this ridiculous joke, by this

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absurd catch-word, by idiots who have actually called upon him dressed in whiskers, that he has shaved ! ”

“ Shaved ! Good Heavens ! Shaved ! ”

The prisoner dropped in a limp mass upon a seat.

Delighted at what he believed to be the effect of his earnest remonstrance on his client, the solicitor seized the opportunity to escape.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FICKLENESS OF THE PUBLIC

It was with an air of firm determination that our hero entered the dock at the Police Court the next morning.

His face was drawn, and his expression hard. He was a man fighting with his back to the wall, and he felt that the wall was crumbling. The Court was packed, as on the previous occasion, and the general public seemed far more interested than before. But the prosecution, the magistrate, and the police appeared to take no interest in the prisoner. They seemed bored with him. Apparently he was to their professional eyes an entirely uninteresting prisoner. Clearly, something astounding had happened. But what?

This chilly reception, even if he noticed it, had no appreciably depressing effect on the Self-seeker.

Directly he entered the dock he addressed the listless Magistrate in firm tones.

"Sir, I have an application to make. My solicitor is not here."

"I don't think you require a solicitor," said Mr. Henderson, with a semi-humorous wave of his hand.

"Pardon me, sir ; I am the best judge of that. I ask you to adjourn the Court for the attendance of my solicitor. I have paid him the sum of ten pounds. Further, I have wired to him this morning, insisting on his presence here, and he is not present."

"He ought to be here," the Magistrate said, taking apparently more interest in the solicitor's absence than in the prisoner's presence. "Who is your solicitor?"

"Mr. Varner."

"Which Mr. Varner?"

"Varner and Varner, Sons, and Varners."

"I've heard of Varner and Company, of Varner Brothers, and also of Varner, Varner, and Varner, but never of the brand you mention, Varner et fils, a special cuvée, I should say," he added, with Anglo-French humour, which was just a little above the heads of his audience. Yet Mr. Henderson personally preferred his cosmopolitan jests to any other portion of his humorous output.

"But the solicitor called on me at Holloway. He said he was an old schoolfellow of mine."

"At what school?"

"He didn't say." The wretched prisoner began to fear that he had been the victim of a swindle. Fate was against him. Sir Theodore had shaved! His solicitor was a myth! What would happen next—and eventually?

"Where did the solicitor practise?"

"9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, Southampton Buildings, Chancery Lane."

"These colossally numerical addresses deceive the unmathematical. They describe one room on a tenth floor," said the Magistrate, kindly. "I am afraid that you have been imposed on by a swindler, who has adopted a well-known and honoured name to perpetrate a cruel fraud."

The Self-seeker shivered at the shock.

"However, it doesn't very much matter to you, fortunately."

"If it doesn't matter to me, to whom does it matter? I am accused of murder, and I have precisely three pounds, seven and sixpence with which to establish my innocence."

"That sum will be more than sufficient," was Mr. Henderson's comment. The prisoner collapsed completely at what he supposed was the Magistrate's humour.

At that moment Mr. Varner entered the court. He was limp and haggard. There was not a

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flutter in his coat tails as he walked up to the Counsel for the Crown.

The prisoner shouted, "There is the villain. What school were we at, sir? Answer me, sir."

The solicitor, who was utterly crestfallen, only shrugged his shoulders by way of reply, and continued talking to the barrister.



At length the Counsel for the prosecution addressed the Court.

"I think before going further, your worship, it would be well for me to explain that what the prisoner says is actually true; he had consulted Mr. Horace Varner, son of the late eminent Mr. Theobold Varner, with regard to his defence. Mr. Horace Varner, who has only just set up in business, has briefed Sir Theodore Parker, and taken all possible steps in the interest of his client."

The Magistrate, addressing Mr. Varner, said, "I am glad to find there exist even more members of your talented family than I was aware of. I am also glad that the steps you have so energetically taken in the interest of your client are thrown away."

The prisoner cried excitedly : " Thrown away ! Am I not to be defended ? "

The Magistrate answered amusingly, " No. It is not necessary. "

" Not necessary ! It is imperative. "

The Counsel continued : " As you, sir, are well aware, circumstances have rendered it impossible for me to proceed with this prosecution. It would seem that Inspector Clegg, who is too ill to be present here to-day, was unfortunately misled by the prisoner's vague demeanour and unsatisfactory appearance. It is quite clear that the prisoner is, at any rate, not guilty of *this* murder. Whoever he is, and whatever he is, he is not Briscoe. The real Charles James Briscoe surrendered at Bow Street late last night, and confessed that he was guilty of the murder of his wife. "

Then there was a " sensation in court. " It was not a sensation of pleasure. It was a sensation of disappointment. If the spectators assembled to witness a bull fight at San Sebastian had been

suddenly informed that the bull purveyed by the Duke of Verragua had died a natural death, their grief would have been more demonstrative, but not more real than was that of the British public which was assembled at Marlborough Street to see a man in torture, when counsel made this announcement.

Public indignation waxed hot against the "bogus Briscoe," as he was instantaneously christened.

No wonder that he had "kept his end up," if he wasn't Briscoe! But he had not behaved frankly. He had deliberately misled the public.

"You are discharged," said the Magistrate sharply. "Don't let me see you here again."

The man who had been Briscoe was soundly hissed as he left the dock.

But it was not till he had wandered out into the sunshine of Regent Street that he actually understood that he was once more a free man, an unnamed unit, floating on the sea of life.

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM THE CAFÉ ROYAL TO THE "BULLER'S HEAD."

WHEN he reached the Café Royal he gave vent to the instincts which are common to all discharged prisoners. He had the best meal that his means allowed. The meal exhausted approximately one-third of his means, and with a capital of two pounds three shillings and sixpence he renewed, rather hopelessly, his quest for himself and the woman he loved.

Up and down Regent Street he walked, seeking the face of any one who knew him, or of any one whom he might know. On two occasions he saw features of persons, unrecognized by him, rippling into smiles of recognition. But the smiles stopped still-born on their faces.

The removal of his whiskers, he felt sure, had entirely destroyed his identity. They had been the main feature of his personality, and now that

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they were gone he had practically ceased to exist. What was to be done ?

He had only £2 3s. 6d. between himself and starvation, and the idea struck a chill at his heart. He knew of no trade, industry, or swindle, by which he could earn a single penny, honest or otherwise.

Passing a hair-dresser's shop, an idea occurred to him—he would buy a set of false whiskers.

Identification was a matter of life and death. If he were not identified before his money was exhausted, he would drift to the workhouse !

That would be the end of all things ! So he entered the shop.

“Have you any whiskers ? ”

The shopkeeper was a little sceptical of the questioner's *bona-fides*. But the evident earnestness of the little man suggested the advisability of keeping an open mind.

“You require artificial whiskers ? ”

“Precisely.”

“About what price ? ”

“I do not know the market-price, but I want a cheap set.”

“For your own use ? ”

“Well, do you think I want 'em for my wife ? ”

The shopman showed him a selection. They

were whiskers calculated to make the wearer look like a buttermilk, or a person who provided the public with commodities on a universal scale.

"These are what we sell most of," said the shopman apologetically.



"These are not what I want ; they are woolly. I want something more whiskery."

"Do you require them for a fancy-dress ball, or merely to frighten the children ?"

"I want them for ordinary wear."

"Oh, for purposes of disguise ?"

"What ?"

"You want to be disguised by making yourself up as somebody else."

"No, I want to make myself up as myself. My present condition is in itself a disguise."

"I take your meaning," said the assistant, lying with caution.

"I'm glad you do! I realize that my request is a little out of the common. What I want is a pair of straggly black whiskers, coming to a point."

"Oh, Sir Theodore Parkers," he said, mentioning the trade-term.

"No, I don't want Sir Theodore Parker's. I want you to provide me with a pair of new artificial whiskers for my own use."

"Will you step this way?"

The Self-seeker stepped into a back-parlour, where the intelligent assistant manipulated some crape hair with considerable skill. Under the direction of the patient, the hair was firmly fixed to his cheeks with spirit gum. The effect was life-like and horrible. The charge was 4s. 6d.

Then, with £1 19s. in his pocket and the whiskers on his face, he walked hopefully up and down Regent Street.

Urchins and respectable Hooligans commented on his appearance.

He walked along to a refrain of "Where's your whiskers?"

TOM BROWNE



"WHERE'S YOUR
WHISKERS?"

P

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The catch-word was a sort of verbal influenza. Every one had caught it.

Smartly dressed women whispered it to one another. Stolid-faced men moved their mouths, unconsciously asking the question as to the whereabouts of his whiskers.

The words of the popular song were shouted by drivers of large carts and others in positions of vantage.

"I say,
What's his lay ?
He wears whiskers night and day.
Tricky little whiskers, sticky little whiskers,
He wears whiskers ! Ain't he gay ?"

The words were better and the rhymes more perfect than is generally the case in really popular comic-songs. (But the song seemed so horribly personal that the Self-seeker did not reflect on its literary merits.)

It is not at all pleasant for a respectable pedestrian, bent on an undertaking of vital importance, to cause a thoroughfare in a great city to burst into song at his progress.

With set stern face, he walked up and down till half-past nine. There was no result. Tired and worn and disappointed, he then took refuge in the side streets. At length he found himself in the neighbourhood of the Edgware Road. Feeling

quite exhausted, and not knowing which way to turn, it happened that he caught sight of a sickly illuminated sign—"Single beds for gentlemen only, one shilling."

He engaged a single bed, and paid his shilling. The other gentlemen in the room were, at any rate, not members of clubs of repute. One was a pickpocket.

He had a business appointment early the next morning, and left before the Self-seeker was awake.

When he awoke his capital was reduced to elevenpence, but happily his whiskers were still adhesive.

So hopelessly disappointed was he at his loss, that he almost regretted that it was impossible for him to give himself up to the police as Briscoe, and have done with it.

With heavy steps he turned out into Praed Street, and shuffled along that revolting thoroughfare. He went westwards. Somehow he had not the courage to go to Regent Street again, and face the gibes of the inconsiderate and the musical efforts of tuneful draymen.

In Winter Street, near Paddington Station, he did a foolish thing. He entered the "Buller's Head," a public-house, and drank a brandy and soda.

Fourpence remained.

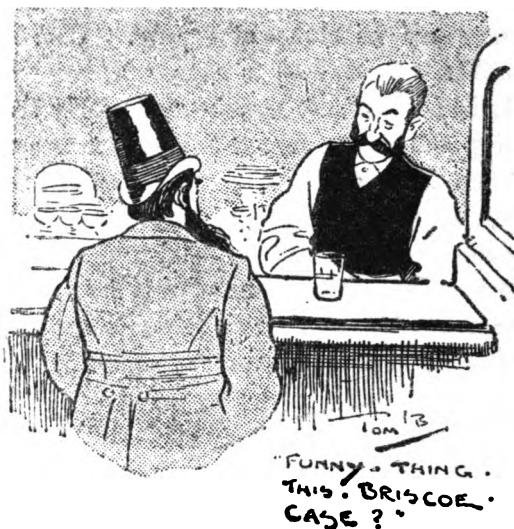
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The publican, a hearty, pleasant fellow, showed a tendency to talk.

"Funny thing, this Briscoe case?"

"Yes."

"Smart chap the other Briscoe; the one they



caught first. I shouldn't be surprised if he did it all along, and the other chap confessing only as a put-up job."

"Rather a serious matter for the other chap."

"What's to prevent his withdrawing his confession, and saying that he made it under the influence of drink, as the saying is?"

"Good heavens ! I hope he won't do that."

"But it would be a rum go if he did."

"Intensely."

"One of the rummiest goes I've ever known."

"Quite, I should say ; quite ; without, of course, having any idea of your experience of goes, I think you said."

"Oh, I've seen some rum goes in my time, I can tell you."

He described a few of the rummiest whilst busying himself with the stage-management of the properties on the bar. But he was inquisitively looking at the stranger all the time.

Suddenly he said, "I can't for the life of me remember where I've seen your face before."

The customer beamed. "Where ? Where do you think it was ?"

"That's just what I can't make out. You don't remember me, I suppose, mister ? Bob Chiltern is my name."

"Frankly, I don't."

"Puzzling, ain't it ? Suddenly I shall give a start, and I shall say to my wife, 'Why, the gentleman was Mr. Leslie Spokes or Mr. Arthur Roberts,' as the case may be. And the missus will say, 'I've never known you to be wrong, Bob, yet. You're slow and sure, Bob, but you're

always right in the end. 'That's your way.' And she's not far off the mark."

"An invaluable quality in a wife, Mr. Chiltern."

"As you say. None better. But your face does puzzle me, with the whiskers and what not."

"I should be very pleased to know when it was that we met, and how. In fact, I shall return at no very distant date in the hope that you, with the assistance of your amiable lady, will have come to some conclusion on the matter. Good-day to you, Mr. Chiltern."

"Good-day, sir."

On leaving the public-house, he walked along Praed Street in the direction of the Edgware Road. Before he had gone a hundred yards an affable young Jew, who was lolling outside an old-clothes-shop, "passed the time of day" by asking if he wanted to buy a fine fur coat. It is the practice of persons in that line of business to flatter possible clients who clearly belong to the class of vendors by suggesting the advisability of a purchase.

The Self-seeker, by reason of his inharmonious appearance, conveyed to the dealer the circumstances of poverty. The passer-by had no gloves or stick. He wore a tall hat and a frock-coat. The most elementary acquaintance with the usage

of society teaches that a person who cannot afford such neccessities of modern life as a pair of gloves and a stick may be willing to dispense (for a consideration) with such inconvenient luxuries as a frock-coat and a silk hat.

"No, I do not want to buy a fur coat."

"Aill giff you thix and thix for the coat and vest, thelp me."

This tender for his clothing suggested to the mind of the Self-seeker the possibility of selling, at any rate, something to the young man. His watch he would not dispose of until such moment as necessity became direr still.

The frock-cloak he clung to. But he might dispense with "the Parker." It was above him in station. He felt that he could no longer live up to the "Parker" hat.

"What will you give me for this hat?"

"Thtep inthide, guvnor."

He thtepped inthide Moss's Modern Mart. The young man examined the hat carefully.

"Thith ith a theatrical hat," he said contemptuously.

"What do you mean by 'theatrical' hat? There is nothing histrionic about my hat."

"Why, it's the thort of hat that they uthe on the thtage in 'Mithe and Men,' or 'Amlet.' I'll give you four shillings, thelpme."

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The Self-seeker demurred.

The young trader said, "I'll tell you what I'll do."



"WHAT WILL YOU
GIVE ME FOR
THIS MAT?"

Then he told him what he'd do. He proposed adding a blue cricket-cap with detachable nickel club badge as a bonus.

"This is the badge of one of the best thicling clubs in the north of Wales," he said invitingly. "Gives toniness to the cap. Try it on. You look a lord, thelpme. Really, you look quite the athlete."

He took the four shillings, and, wearing the cap, walked out of the Modern Mart.

"Bleth my thoul," said the young trader, "I believe I've put a Masonic order on the cap after all."

* * * * *

The Self-seeker's thoughts were bitter. He had not advanced one iota in his quest since coming to London. In a cricket-cap and frock-coat he had come to the Metropolis. He had sprung to dizzy heights. He had fallen from those heights. He had been accused of murder. He had lost his money and his whiskers. And now, after these days, he was still pacing London streets in a frock-coat and a cricket-cap. The only actual gain was the detachable club badge, but its importance was trivial, as he was not going to cycle in North Wales.

Apart from this very unsatisfactory balance-sheet, there was another cause for anxiety. Ever since he had been arrested over the Briscoe case, the idea that he might actually be a criminal of

some sort haunted him. Though he was not the murderer of Mrs. Briscoe, he might have devoted his talents to some other branch of crime. He could not fix upon any form of law-breaking for which he possessed a pronounced partiality. As far as he could see, he was honest. But his opportunities for dishonesty had been nil. If he was a forger of cheques, circumstances had not hitherto given him any inkling that he had a penchant for that particular profession. Had he been a fraudulent company-promoter, surely the smart ladies that he had passed in Regent Street would have recognized him as a patron and a friend. The only really unpleasant traits in his character which had revealed themselves, after serious self-examination, were the possession of a singularly hasty temper and a partiality for Benedictine. The idea that he was a drunkard he very rightly pooh-poohed. But he might, perhaps, when under the influence of temper stimulated by alcohol, have committed some crime of violence. He felt, at any rate, that his past might possibly include some such reprehensible act.

Therefore it was that he had not adopted what might have seemed to a less careful man to be an obvious and promising course, namely, an advertisement in the "Found" column of the *Daily Mail*.

A full description of himself circulated throughout the country would infallibly bring him to the notice of the police.

Then, by means of their admirable system



of identification, he might be identified as anybody, from an expert burglar to an attempted suicide.

He preferred to remain at large, hampered and harassed though he was by impecuniosity, to which he felt sure he was habitually a stranger.

It was by no means pleasant to him to take his

lunch at an institution modestly but, perhaps, accurately described as

“ A GOOD PULL-UP FOR CARMEN.”

He, himself, did not understand what this rather squalid eating-shop had to do with the heroine of Bizet's opera.

So he inquired intelligently and in all good faith.

The proprietor and food-distributor asked what he was driving at, and declined to understand him.

However, he secured a large quantity of substantial food for eightpence, and did not worry further about the name of the shop.

Then, having no business on hand, he returned to the “Buller's Head,” in the hope that the proprietor might by now have discovered where he had previously seen him.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW HE LASTED TILL CLOSING TIME

WHEN the Self-seeker entered the private bar, five or six persons were engaged in a political discussion, in which the proprietor joined from time to time, not so much in his capacity of proprietor as in that of a superior equal.

The talk was about budgets, and income-tax, and millions.

The company included a couple of intelligent coachmen, a wooden-legged crossing-sweeper from Westbourne Terrace, who took charge of a city library in the evenings, and the president of a whelk-stand.

With people in these walks of life politics are the equivalent of the Culturine which is the staple subject of show-conversation with the more highly educated.

But on the entrance of the Self-seeker the discussion dropped. A creditable but by no means usual sensation of nervousness seized the

speakers. Each one of them knew that he personally was entirely ignorant of the subject under discussion, though far better informed on the matter than were the rest of the bogus politicians in the private bar.

There is always a possibility that a newcomer may be actually familiar with budgets, and may even pay income-tax himself, and may handle sovereigns every day of his life.

The five men in the "saloon" were habitual clients of the house, and they silently allowed the stranger to approach the bar.

Mr. Chiltern received the note of inquiry that the new customer darted at him with a face flat with negation.

The Self-seeker, disappointed, asked for a glass of beer. He was surrounded by a semicircle of the frequenters of the house.

"It's an odd thing, gents," said the proprietor, "I know this gentleman's face as well as I know my own, and yet I can't fix it."

Whereupon, each of the gents carefully inspected the face which could not be fixed.

This proceeding was somewhat embarrassing.

"'Ave you ever met Mr. Chiltern before?" asked the fatter of the two coachmen.

"I've never had the pleasure, to my knowledge."

The crossing-sweeper, a man with a somewhat intellectual expression, said, "Pardon the liberty in a casual acquaintance, but haven't you ever sat to nobody for your caricature?"

"Never, so far as I know."

Then the sweeper explained to the general company the object of his question—

"I was thinking that the gentleman looked like one of them *Vanity Fair* cartoons of somebody else. Not of the gentleman himself, of course," he added, by way of a proper apology.

"Appearances is deceptive," said the man in the wheel trade. "And likenesses is more so. But photographs is worse. As for cartoons—look at Harcourt! Is he like his cartoon? Nohow. Is his own cartoons like Harcourt? Not so. Far otherwise."

"Mr. Partridge is right," said the proprietor. "Only last week I see a caricature in a comic. I says to Henry here, 'You were in Lord Rosebery's stables when you were a lad; who's caricature is this?' I says, covering up the letter-press. 'Morley,' he says. And sure enough, when we come to read the letter-press, just for argument sake, it turned out to be 'Erbert Campbell.'"

"So it was," said Henry here. He was the best-looking of all the coachmen who frequented the house. Owing to his previous political

connection he was not expected to take any active part in discussion, but was appealed to respectfully as "Henry here," ex-officio arbitrator and general referee.

"It turned out to be 'Erbert right enough," was the official endorsement of "Henry here."

"Which shows how one can be mistaken by looking to caricatures for likenesses," said the proprietor. "Why, if anybody was to draw me with an elephant's body and a tubular trunk, my Missus wouldn't know me from Harcourt. Put an eyeglass on Mr. Partridge, and who says Chamberlain? There you are."

"Who's talking about the Missus?" cried a stout lady, who bounced laboriously into the bar and fixed up her towzled hair with a movement which seemed part of her system of locomotion. She gave an arch smile of welcome to the assembled gents.

"Why, here's the very gentleman as I was speaking to you about just now, dearie," said the proud proprietor of the "Buller's Head," and the lady with the smile. "My best respects," she beamed at the Self-seeker.

"My dear madam, if you have ever met me on a previous occasion, I shall be delighted if you will tell me exactly when it was that I experienced that extreme felicity," he said, not so much with

a view to making a conquest of the lady, as in the hope of extracting valuable information.

"Come here, my dear ; let's have a look at you closer."

The stranger leant over the bar.

The regular customers anticipated amusement from Mrs. Chiltern.

"Polly *was* a one," was her local reputation. Many persons maintained that she would have done for a play. She would. She would have completely "done" for any musical piece that has been produced in our day.

As she put her face close against that of the stranger, who was pressed up to the bar by the clients, the proprietor, who loved his wife, looked jealously at the Self-seeker.

"You ain't exactly a Venus," said the fair Polly in the true vein of refined musical comedy.

The proprietor led the roar of genuine laughter that followed this sally, for sally, indeed, it was.

"Why, the left one is three weeks older than the other," she said, emboldened by her artistic triumph. "They can't be twins."

Before the stranger could stop her she had a whisker in each hand. He drew back impatiently.

The right, or younger, whisker remained in her hand.

A shout of laughter rent the private bar.

Polly danced heavily about, flaunting her trophy.

"Give me that, give me that, I say, woman," cried the stranger, clutching anxiously across the bar. Mrs. Chiltern elusively continued her dance.

The clients continued to laugh at the wretched little man who, with one enormous black whisker on his left cheek, was jumping after the fashion of an hysterical kangaroo in pursuit of the triumphant lady on the other side of the bar.



"Give me that whisker! Do not trifle with me! I insist on having that whisker. I shall call the police.

Madam, give me that whisker."

The proprietor had hitherto maintained an attitude of moody, but masterful inaction.

Now he spoke.

"You'll call the police, will you? I'll show you. I'll teach you to come here in a comic kit."

The stranger was paralyzed.

Laughter had gone from the private bar.

The clients realized the situation—the proprietor was a big man ; the proprietor loved his wife ; the absurd little stranger had threatened her with the police. Things were going to happen to the little panting man with the one whisker.

The clients drew away from the bar in order to facilitate the happening of these things.

“Give me that whisker,” cried the Self-seeker, regardless of his danger. “It is *my* whisker, and you have no right to touch it.”

He continued his caperings till the heavy hand of the proprietor on his shoulder brought him to an indignant standstill.

“What do you mean by coming to the private bar of a licensed house in a disguise, eh ?”

“That’s my business.”

“Is it ? We’ll see about that. We’ll see what the police have to say about that.”

“No. I decline to allow you to communicate with the police,” said the little man, indignantly.

“Oh, you decline, do you ? What do you think of that, gentlemen ?”

The gentlemen did not evidently think highly of the veto which it was sought to place on the calling in of the police.

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"Perhaps, he's a play-actor," suggested the literary crossing-sweeper.

"No, sir, I am not a play-actor! I have been many things, or, rather, I have almost been many things, but I am not a play-actor."



Tom is

"What do you mean
by coming to the
private bar of a
licensed house in a
disguise, eh?"

"Then what are you?"

"Why don't the bloke explain what he is?"

"I am not a play-actor, and I am not a bloke :
let that suffice."

But no one appeared willing to let that suffice. The harassed and somewhat grotesque figure found that he was a prisoner in the private bar.

"You wanted to call the police to my wife. What's to prevent me calling them to you, eh?"

"I have a rooted objection to the entire force. I have suffered from them already."

This was an indiscreet admission, and feeling in the bar was distinctly in favour of calling a constable.

"You don't go without you tell us who you are, and explain to these gentlemen and Henry here why you should so demean their company as to disguise yourself."

After a minute's reflection, the Self-seeker made up his mind to tell the truth. He had nothing to lose by it. And, he had his liberty to gain. The idea of another interview with the police filled him with the vaguest and most unpleasant fears.

"I'll tell you if you'll give me back that whisker."

But Polly, in the excitement of the moment, had torn the thing to pieces.

It could, perhaps, have been made into a bird's nest, but it could never again be used for whisker purposes. Regretfully he received it back.

Then, with as much dignity as he could assume, he stated—

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"I am the man who was supposed to be Briscoe. I have adopted this disguise to escape unwelcome attention."

The effect was delightful.

The gentlemen took a huge interest in him. They extracted the entire story of his arrest. Other clients of the house dropped in, and the more prominent ones were introduced to the man who had been Briscoe, and were allowed to stand him drinks. A special bottle of Benedictine was opened for his convenience. Altogether, he spent the most enjoyable afternoon that he could remember.

He had "a bit of dinner" with the Mr. and Mrs. Chiltern in the back-parlour.

After an exceedingly pleasant meal, the proprietor said that, if he wasn't staying with friends, he would be delighted to provide him with a shake-down at the "Buller's Head." He accepted with pleasure.

After dinner he adjourned to the private bar, and, seated on a high stool, he talked about himself with an affability that every one admired. Never had the "Buller's Head" done such a trade! Crime is the most universally interesting subject that exists. Crime appeals to all classes, since every able-bodied person is a potential criminal. The presence of a man who had almost been an

eminent criminal proved a splendid attraction to the "Buller's Head"—even teetotalers and secret drinkers dropped in at the house.

Just before closing time, a late-comer with an inquisitive turn of mind asked this question :



"Why, to prove that you're not Briscoe, do you wear only one whisker? How does that help?"

Then the Self-keeper realized that he had presented a most grotesque appearance to a wonderfully respectful audience. Thoroughly mortified, he tore off the remaining whisker. The

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movement upset his equilibrium. Overcome with Benedictine and conversational exercise, he toppled off his high stool, and lay prone on the floor.

"Lucky he lasted till closing time. He's a wonderful good attraction for the house," said the proprietor to his wife, as he carried the attraction tenderly up to bed.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE KINDNESS OF THE COACHMAN

For two days all went well with the Self-seeker.

The proprietor of the "Buller's Head" was a skilful showman. To affect a previous acquaintanceship with a new customer was a favourite artifice of his, for he knew that most people are flattered at the suggestion that they have been seen before—no matter when or where. New clients would often become old clients by trying to find out where they had previously met Mr. Chiltern.

The very name of his house is some slight proof of his ability as a pushing young publican, for at the height of the war fever he had changed the title from the "Bull's" to the "Buller's Head." This fitting tribute of the licensed victuallers' trade to the persevering General attracted attention and admiration in the neighbourhood. It also attracted customers. Mr. Chiltern was prepared to do anything for the

benefit of his clients, except, of course, to improve the quality of his liquor. But no advertisement had ever compared with the presence of the man who had been Briscoe. He addressed perpetual public meetings, at which he was always in the chair, and always talking about himself. For a man who was naturally egotistical and eloquent his position at the "Buller's Head" was as nearly a Paradise as it is given to most of us to reach on earth.

In addition, there was Benedictine to be had for the accepting at the "Buller's Head."

All the clients were complimentary, nay, fulsome in their remarks.

"You have made history," said the fat coachman.

"That is foolishness," corrected the crossing-sweeper. "By history, I comprehend the doings of nations. He, though he has my best respects, doesn't make history. Now Harcourt makes history, if you like."

The publican defended his *protégé's* claims as a history maker.

"History is of two sorts, and they who make it is of two sorts, likewise. Them as make it and them as write about it; and the two sorts of history is these—Political and Social, or by some called Society History. Now mister, here, makes

Society History, or was used for making it, most disadvantageous. Wasn't his the Mayfair Murder? And if Mayfair don't mean Society, what does?"

"Paddington just as much. Wasn't Tyburn in Paddington?" said the president of the wheelstand. "Wasn't lots of toffs hanged at Tyburn? Ask Henry here."

"Henry here" did not decide the point. (His habitual disinclination to make a definite statement on any disputed matter accounted in no small degree for his popularity as an arbitrator.)

"Paddington, if it means anything—which it don't—means Whiteley's," commented a man of no argumentative status.

And so the chaotic talk went on all day. People started hares and then caught them again themselves, a pursuit which is cultivated by all great orators. "Catch your hare and then wait for a round of applause," is a useful maxim for a public-speaker even in the most restricted sense of the word. So pleased was our friend with the sympathy he obtained that he gradually divulged the entire story of his life, as far as he knew it, which was as far back as the collision at Chalk Farm Station. This gave a new impetus to curiosity. Incredulity, here, came also into play. The story of the police-court had been accepted

as truth without a murmur, but the complete loss of memory proved, to some of the customers, quite a stumbling-block. Three men who believed implicitly in Harcourt and in Wilson-Barrett could put no reliance on the statements of the Self-seeker. Two parties were formed in the "Buller's Head": one party, in favour of the truth of the autobiography, was headed by the crossing-sweeper, supported by the publican, while the incredulous found a capable leader in the whelk-merchant.

"Henry here" remained neutral, as hitherto.

Trade prospered exceedingly, for differences promote drink. "Here's to you, sir, whoever you may be," was a favourite toast. For four days longer the excitement was maintained at fever heat. Then an indiscreet observation, made by "Henry here," brought about a sudden end.

The good-looking coachman came into the bar to "put a bit" on a loser, and asked of the Self-seeker a simple question:

"Where is Barnum?"

"Who's Barnum?" was the innocent query.

"Why, you're Barnum's What-is-it, aren't you? So Bob Chiltern is Barnum, isn't he? Ha! ha!"

"Who," said the Self-seeker firmly, "dared to call me by that atrocious name?"

"Why, Bob christened you that."

"He called me a What-is-it? A Barnum's What-is-it? And he is Barnum! I am Barnum's What-is-it? Good God! I have sunk to that!"

Slowly he took up his cap, with an action expressive of extreme determination. He put it on his head as though attempting to extinguish his



personality. Then he walked deliberately out of the house.

His face was tense with misery as he muttered, "A What-is-it? Barnum's. . . . It is too cruel."

"Henry here" had a kind heart, and he joined the miserable man in the street. He tried to console him, but to no purpose.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

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"Got any money?"

"None. I'm a What-is-it? . . . This is the end."

The kindly coachman almost imperceptibly steered the poor fellow, who was too wretched to notice where he was going, into Charles Mews. There he took him into the stable at 25a, and



INTRODUCED HIM TO HIS WIFE

introduced him to his wife, and kept him for a day, almost like a prophet hid in a cave secretly.

Then the wife objected.

The kindly coachman did not like to turn him out to starve. By a stroke of luck, he found a job for him.

"Henry here" told the Self-seeker that if he went to the Great Western Hotel he might possibly get a job as window-cleaner.

"Anybody can clean windows," said the kind

coachman, reassuringly. (As a matter of fact very few people can clean windows, and these persons all follow some other calling.)

But the Self-seeker had the instincts of a gentleman. He had no wish to be an incubus on the kind coachman, whose happy home he felt he was breaking up. At any rate, it is better and more honourable to be even a bad window-cleaner than a good What-is-it ? however prominent.

So he set forth to seek the job.

He got it.

CHAPTER XXVII

MRS. POTTER

IN appearance she was pink and white and dainty. A pretty little woman. Beyond all question she was a second wife. Some women are born to be wives. Others are, obviously, foredoomed to spinsterhood. Nature, also, produces a class of second wives. The reason that so many marriages turn out unhappily for the parties concerned lies in the unfortunate, but by no means unnatural, desire that men have for marrying their second wives in the first instance. A woman who would make an ideal second wife is, on that very account, doomed to be a failure if wedded to an amateur husband. Of course, any ordinary woman can make a good first wife to an average man.

But few women possess the varied gifts that are absolutely indispensable to the making of even fairly good second wives.

These women are almost a sex apart. Many habitual spinsters make vain attempts to join this

class. When they succeed, their very success is a failure. Women, also, who are palpably designed merely to prepare the way for that most precious type of womanhood, the perfect second wife, force themselves into her sacred sphere and bring disrepute upon it. If a sane man may be influenced by his first wife, surely his character is developed and made perfect by his second. All honour, therefore, to the second wives of England.

They have their disappointments and their sorrows. But they are the backbone of the country. If a man could marry his second wife first there would be fewer bachelors in England.

Mrs. Potter was not, in appearance, a proud woman.

The large quantity of gentlemen engaged in the "Manchester goods" business who knew her husband, an ex-Mayor of Stockport, maintained that Jacob Potter had done surprisingly well for himself at the second time of asking. Everybody in that particular line of commerce liked Jake. They liked him even for his aggressive and obstinate demeanour, because they were well aware that the aggression and the obstinacy were intended to conceal Mr. Potter's lack of commercial intelligence. They saw through Mr. Potter.

The fact that Mr. Potter had amassed a very

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considerable fortune, and was even innocent of having made a bad investment in his extensive dealings outside his legitimate business was known to all.

Through the vagaries of the Trafford Park Estate Co. he had pursued a course of his own, by which he had profited to the extent of £37,000, and had estranged many undesirable friends. Still Manchester saw through him.

And, therefore, Manchester was astounded at the success which had attended his selection of a second wife.

Mrs. Potter, on her arrival from Dorsetshire, had taken a bedroom and sitting-room at the Great Western Hotel.

Having removed her hat and the surroundings of travel in her bedroom, she opened the door into her sitting-room.

Crash !

“Lucy ! My God ! Lucy !”

As a body smashed through the window, she caught sight of a clean-cut face that came through spintering glass like a wedge. The new-comer was obviously a window-cleaner.

Being a self-possessed woman, she did not fly from the room. She merely rang the bell and awaited results.

The foreign substance that had come through

the window collected itself, and rushed at her with cries of, "Lucy, Lucy, my love!"

For an instant she was motionless, staring at the bareness of the new arrival's face.

"Lucy! my love! Lucy!"



But she did not make the mistake of pretending not to recognize her husband, changed almost out of recognition though he was.

"Jacob, what have you to say?" she asked with intense severity.

To the startled servant who came in, she made the startling statement, "Mr. Potter will have lunch with me here."

The maid withdrew.

She repeated, "What have you to say?"

She added, "Mr. Potter."

"Thank God, I've found you."

Lucy was mollified, but had the presence of mind not to show it :

"You left me in one of your violent tempers. You said that you never wanted to see me again."

"Did I? I've forgotten all about that, darling. Did I really say that?"

"Not for the first time. When you didn't return, I went to Dorsetshire to father. He sent me back to Stockport. I'm on my way to Stockport now. After lunch I shall go to Stockport. And I shall never see you again, darling, unless you have a complete explanation to give—and you can make me believe it."

"Oh, my love, my love! Why did I ever leave my Lucy?"

"You left your Lucy because you had given way to one of your terrible tempers."

"Why, oh, why did I give way?"

"Because I suggested that your whiskers were out of fashion. But I am glad to find that you have followed my wish and have had them removed."

"Oh, my darling, was I unkind to my queen of kittens? Did I lose my temper with my purry, purry puss?"

"You did. You walked out of the house saying that you would never enter it again, and then you vanished completely."

"I seem to have forgotten all about that. I remember only our happiness. I feel only my love for you."

"That's all very well, but you have got to account for your absence all this time."

He accounted for his absence—during the whole of lunch. When he had finished, they adjourned for conversation.

"And so my lion, my king of beasts, might have been killed in the horrid railway accident!"

"And my dove has missed her puss-cat, has she?" . . . And so on. They were very much in love. They still are.

To-day Mrs. Potter is regarded as the happiest second wife in the neighbourhood of Manchester. And the ex-Mayor of Stockport has not again lost either his temper or his identity.

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He has gone so far, even, as to alter the name of his exceedingly ugly house. It used to be called "Sandringham." Now it is called "The Nest."

But the adventures of the wife who lost her husband have yet to be described.





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